

A
Little Legacy
By
Mrs. L. B. Walford



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A LITTLE LEGACY



A CLERICAL
EXTERIOR

"A SOUND NEVER HEARD
BEFORE BY HIS
CLERICAL SUPERIOR."

A
LITTLE LEGACY
&
OTHER STORIES

BY
MRS. L. B. WALFORD



HERBERT S. STONE AND COMPANY
CHICAGO AND NEW YORK
MDCCCXCIX

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THE LITTLE LEGACY

The Little Legacy



“Wealth often sows in keeping.”

—QUARLES.



“A hundred thousand is such a good round sum,” said Mr. Mapleson, tentatively. “Seems a pity to spoil the symmetry of it, eh? Any little odds and ends that might be over”—and he looked at his client, as though feeling his way, with the caution habitual to a confidential adviser upon delicate ground.

“It might be more than odds and ends,” replied the client.

“Of course—of course. Might run up to another ‘century,’ or—to anything you please. But as it stands you wish to leave a hundred thousand—the amount of your actual capital at the present moment—to

your nearest of kin, Mr. Charles Grenoble; and there are a few hundreds over——”

“A thousand,” corrected the client.

“A thousand. And there may be a few more thousands—there *may* be, as I said, anything you like to name. Should it amount to any decent sum—say, to ten or twenty—nothing would be easier than to add this on; but meantime—hum, ha—is there no one? Have you no poor devil of a relation to whom such a trifle——”

“You have some one in your eye.” Mr. Grenoble, the Mr. Grenoble whose will was being made, was a man of quick intelligence, and knew his old friend in and out. “Out with it, Mapleson. Of whom are you thinking?”

“Ha! ha! ha! ’Pon my word——” the lawyer laughed, played with his pen, and shot a glance. He had

not meant to be detected in a stray impulse; and, moreover, was not precisely sure whether detection might not defeat his object. "You are so uncommonly sharp," he murmured, "that — well — it's no use beating about the bush with *you*; I had best own up, I suppose: there is that poor fellow, Tom Hathaway——"

"Oh, bother Tom Hathaway!"

"He is some sort of cousin, isn't he?"

"Cousin? What's a cousin?" The rich Mr. Grenoble frowned and growled over his basin of soup. He was an invalid for the time being, and had summoned his solicitor to his sick-room, having, as he said, a day or two leisure wherein to look into his affairs.

"If one were to take into consideration every poor, shiftless hanger-on who calls himself a cousin——"

"Quite so, quite so. It is simply

folly to fritter away capital in dribblets. I catch your meaning; and we are quite at one on the point. Still"—the lawyer yawned and shifted his leg—"still, Tom is a decent fellow; and I fancy, with a wife and a large family, must find it rather a struggle——"

"What business has a man in his position with a wife and a large family?"

"None whatever, of course," said Mr. Mapleson, cheerfully. "You and I, two jolly bachelors——" and he proceeded to enlarge.

It took an hour's time, but ere the close of the interview he had gained his point. For each objection raised he had a cordial assent; in all general condemnation of poor men, and the desirability of ignoring their existence, and leaving them to lie upon the bed themselves had made, he could promptly acquiesce; but insensibly the wealthy testator found

himself being led, first to argue the pros and cons of the case in question, then to yield a sort of tacit consent, fenced in by many a reservation; and finally to permit the clause to be added which his legal adviser had intended to add from the beginning of the conversation.

“Now, what on earth did I do that for?” muttered the latter to himself as, the business concluded, he went his way. “It has cost me a lot of time and trouble; and, except for the pleasure of getting my own way, I can’t imagine what object I had in view. Benevolence isn’t in my line. And it’s a queer sort of thing that the sight of a man’s face, and a few ordinary words let fall in my hearing—not even addressed to me—should have stirred up all this coil! It’s not likely to do any good, either. Grenoble may live for twenty years, and pile up his ‘centuries’ like W. G. Grace. He will

be sending for me again before I can look round, to make a new will, and bowl out poor Tom. Gad! I wish I had let Tom alone! It is two o'clock now," consulting his watch, "and I ought to have lunched at one; and though I told Grenoble that it was no matter, when he was sitting sipping his slops in his comfortable armchair, I didn't bargain for having to go without food until an hour beyond my usual time. What did I do it for, I say?" proceeded the lawyer, testily. "Because I am an old fool, and Tom Hathaway's hungry face—there he is now, coming out of a tea shop!" suddenly bending forward, as his hansom whirled rapidly along the Strand. "Had a roll and butter for his luncheon, I dare say—and some coffee, or disgusting trash of that kind! No wonder he looks white and thin! Digestion all gone to the dogs, I'll be bound. Faith! Tom,

if you knew what I've been doing for you just now," apostrophising the unconscious pedestrian who hurried past; and was soon lost in the crowd, "you'd hold your shoulders a little straighter, my man! But it'll all come to nothing—it'll all come to nothing," mused Mr. Herbert Mapleson, his busy mind again at work on contingencies and probabilities. "Tom's little legacy will never come off, I shouldn't mind betting a hundred to one. Lucky he doesn't know of it! 'Blessed are they which expect nothing, for they shall not be disappointed.' " And dismissing the subject from his thoughts, the prosperous man of business settled down to other matters, which demanded the whole of his time and attention until the close of the day.

Nothing was further from his anticipations than to have it recalled within the week—almost, as he

declared among his colleagues, before the ink was dry upon the parchment—by the swift development of his old friend's complaint, ending as it did in Mr. Grenoble's decease before the lapse of another month.

"Bless my soul! if Tom Hathaway hasn't come in for that legacy after all! I—'pon my word—I little thought I was doing Tom such a good turn."

It was not perhaps strictly decorous, but this was, as a fact, Mr. Mapleson's first thought on receiving the intelligence.

He had been prepared for it. The doctors had looked serious from the day on which a change set in and new symptoms appeared (that being, as we have said, very shortly after the interview above narrated took place); in consequence our legal friend had had time to acclimatise himself to the idea, and to ponder

at intervals over the contents of the will which he had so recently drawn up; also to heave an easy sigh now and again on the altar of friendship.

But he had never known Mr. Grenoble intimately; their relations had always been more or less on a business footing; and he knew so many people—met so many familiar countenances every day—had such innumerable interests, and such a cool head and heart wherewith to meet them—that one loss in the large circle of his acquaintance—one, moreover, which did not enter into his daily life—could not be expected to affect him deeply.

Furthermore, there was a “big thing” on the Stock Exchange which interested Mr. Mapleson very keenly indeed. He could not quite make up his mind about it; it might be that he was losing a chance; on the other hand, he was disinclined to meddle with any of his invest-

ments, and had no loose money handy at the moment. He was almost worried about the matter; and had nearly decided to let things go, and turn a deaf ear to the crowings over their luck which fortunate speculators kept pouring into his ear, when the post brought him a large fee which came in a manner unexpectedly—that is to say, he had not reckoned upon its payment before a later date. He took the cheque and looked at it; then he rang the bell. Within half an hour his broker on 'Change had received an order. This was on the day of Mr. Grenoble's demise.

It was a matter of course that Mr. Mapleson should attend the funeral, which followed within the week; and he reflected that after discharging that unpleasant duty—for the day was bitterly cold and raw, and the long, slow drive to Kensal Green, in addition to the rest of the

ceremonial, was a detestable prospect—he should at least have some gratification in the two legal communications regarding the nature of the will, which would fall to his pen. One of these, indeed, he dashed off through his clerk as he was putting on his great coat.

“Poor Tom Hathaway will go home a trifle warmer this wretched evening if he carries this note in his waistcoat pocket,” reflected he, briskly moving about and turning over papers to make sure that nothing was forgotten.

“I shan’t return to the office, Williams,” aloud to the confidential clerk. “It will be late before I get back from the cemetery, and Mr. Charles Grenoble may wish me to go with him to his house. But mind that I get all notes and letters which come in before the office closes, as soon afterwards as possible. Bring them to me yourself. And if Mr.

So-and-So should send over (naming his broker), 'go and see him yourself; tell him where I am gone, and if he has any message of importance, ask him either to wire or to give you a note. Prepare the draft for Mr. Charles Grenoble, and bring it to me to sign. I don't think there is anything else;" and taking up his hat and gloves the speaker, somewhat ruefully, quitted his snug chamber and prepared to brave the raw atmosphere of a November afternoon.

But few of those who had known the late Mr. Grenoble cared to do the same; and it appeared that on the return journey his nephew and only relation present was about to drive alone in the mourning coach which had followed next the hearse in the outward-bound procession, when on a sudden Mr. Mapleson took a resolution. He had been somewhat coldly greeted by the prin-

cipal mourner, for whom he had neither liking nor esteem—(and it may be added that he had merely thrown in the suggestion of going to Mr. Charles Grenoble's house, above recorded, as an excuse for not returning to the City, rather than from any real intention of carrying it into effect)—but it occurred to him now that it might be rather an amusing experience to try the effect of unbosoming himself regarding the will he had drawn up a month before, when alone with the principal legatee.

“Whatever he may *expect*, he can't be *certain* of anything,” reflected the lawyer, shrewdly, “and I should doubt if he even has any great expectations. There was no love lost between the two. They kept aloof from each other as much as they could, and snapped and snarled when they had to meet. They were as like as two peas—a couple of

surly, selfish, ill-conditioned peas. But 'tis ill speaking hard words of the dead," hastily covering his head again, as the group moved away from the grave. "I oughtn't to have been thinking of such things just now," with a twinge of remorse, "and perhaps poor Charles Grenoble," casting a glance in the latter's direction, "would be hurt and affronted if he knew. He *may* have some feeling, for all that stucco face. Anyhow, he'll look sweet for once, when he hears he has come in for a hundred thousand pounds. That's a lubrication adamant itself can't resist. He might even give me some of the handling of it," and Mr. Mapleson was presently by the other's side.

"If you have no objection, I shall ride home with you?" And a somewhat stiff assent having been signified, the coach started with its two occupants.

“You will receive a formal communication from me in the course of this evening, Mr. Grenoble.” (“May as well begin at once,” cogitated the lawyer, feeling that the sooner the ice was broken the better.) Then he emitted a little preliminary cough, and straightened his collar. “I dare say that its contents will be no surprise.” Here the speaker paused, awaiting some sign of interest. None came.

“Being the late Mr. Grenoble’s natural heir”—(another pause; Mr. Charles Grenoble looked straight in front of him)—“you are, of course, prepared to hear that he has made a will in your favour.” Still no response.

(“Won’t commit himself,” muttered Mapleson, internally. “Uncivil brute, as he always was!”)

“I drew it up a month ago,” proceeded he, aloud, “and am pleased to be able to inform you—(Hanged

if I am pleased!" mental comment) —"that the amount of your uncle's capital at that time was a hundred thousand pounds; which sum is left to you unconditionally. Your uncle was worth a hundred thousand odd, I should say—for there was a trifle over, how much I don't quite know—bequeathed to another and more distant relation."

"To whom?" For the first time the fixed, immovable lips parted; but the head did not turn—no, not by a hair's breadth—towards Mr. Charles Grenoble's companion.

"To whom? To your cousin, Mr. Thomas Hathaway. Mr. Hathaway——"

"I have no interest in Mr. Hathaway."

"Ah, indeed; no family intercourse. Yes, I suppose so; I understood as much; but Mr. Grenoble thought——"

A wave of the other's hand disposed of Mr. Grenoble's thoughts.

("What on earth—is he not going to say *anything*? Was there ever such a—— Confound it! I wish I had not let myself in for this! Devil take him and his hundred thousand!") The lawyer's temper was rising; Mr. Mapleson was not a man to be treated with indignity; and the present rebuff was the more acutely felt in that he had prepared himself for something altogether different.

He would have had no objection to a passage at arms with Mr. Charles Grenoble at any time; even coldness and silence could have had their tit-for-tat on any other occasion. But to have somewhat genially broached a subject, confident of its favourable reception, one which should have obtained at least a civil hearing, and display of interest, if not of warmth—and to have been snubbed—yes, actually snubbed—as though he had

made an officious and altogether superfluous communication, was intolerable.

He drew himself upright in his corner, vowing inwardly that he had learned a lesson in mankind. Even the acquisition of a hundred thousand pounds would not make a cur less a cur for a single fraction of a minute, than he was by nature.

Certes, if silence were the order of the day, he would not again essay to break it. He too could look gloomily out of his window, and occupy himself with his own reflections.

He had enough to think about, in all conscience. Perhaps at that very time he was making a handsome *coup* on 'Change, one which should bring him in, if not a hundred thousand, at any rate what would be a very solid addition to his already flourishing income. He would be pleased enough to net his six or

seven thousand, and would not be above owning it. Indeed, he frankly avowed to himself that the telling his friends, and chuckling over his good fortune with them, would be the "milk in the cocoanut" of the whole proceeding.

Mr. Mapleson was not an avaricious man, and had already all his wants supplied, together with a future comfortably provided for. But it was his theory that no man of sense ever despised wealth; and since he himself was ready to acknowledge this opinion—to proclaim and justify it, if need were—it was unendurable in his eyes that a professed money-grubber, such as he had always held Mr. Charles Grenoble to be, should stroke his impassive face and stare vacantly from the window, affecting indifference to the important news he had just heard. Worse than all, that he should have the cool audacity to

imagine that anyone, least of all his clever self, could be deceived by such a clumsy piece of acting.

As soon as decency permitted, he would end the scene and escape from the thrall of such companionship—never, he swore to himself, to be caught in such a trap again—and accordingly hailed a passing hansom, the first that came in sight.

“You are getting out here?” Mr. Charles Grenoble involuntarily exhibited participation in the other’s relief; then, to the lawyer’s amazement, held out his hand with actual and undisguised cordiality. “Stop one moment, Mr. Mapleson, before you get out. I believe I ought to beg your pardon for having been rude to you just now. I am afraid you must have thought my conduct somewhat extraordinary, but I assure you it was not intentional—that is to say, the fact is I am so

bothered with money coming in from here and from there, and from goodness knows where, that sometimes I'—(putting his hand to his forehead)—“the worry of it will drive me distracted some day, I believe! I was just afraid of what my uncle would do. Of course, he could not leave it to anyone else; that would have been highly improper; and I can't imagine what could have put it into his head to throw any away upon that poor, unfortunate Tom Hathaway, who has never *got on* in anything he undertook, has never been the slightest credit to the family, and has not been taken any notice of by either of us for years and years. To rake him up now is a sheer piece of folly, and will lead to endless complications. He will fancy he is to begin coming to our houses, and will be expecting invitations and so forth—and this when he has been kept at

arm's length all his life! There was no need to have disturbed the existing state of things—none whatever. I must own, Mr. Mapleson, that for a moment I had a sort of suspicion that it was you who had been so inconsiderate as to prompt my uncle"—(if Mr. Mapleson experienced any internal sensations, at least he did not betray himself)—“and that annoyed me,” proceeded the speaker, as though now satisfied he had made a wrongful accusation. “The whole thing is annoying; but I must do my best,” heaving a sigh. “I must look out some new investments, and go through those the funds are in already. It will be a heap of trouble—endless trouble—and that just when I was hoping to take things a little more easily. My doctor says that if I don't take care and give myself more holiday, he won't answer for the consequences. Look at my poor uncle! And I

have double, treble his responsibilities. I have nearly double as much again to manipulate; it's a heavy strain upon a man. I ask you, therefore, to excuse me, Mr. Mapleson, if in the first flush of vexation I could not bring myself to acquiesce cordially in the arrangement. I hope you will overlook anything that gave you offence, and—and I shall communicate with you later on."

"Now, how much of that was genuine, and how much was humbug?" quoth Mapleson to himself, trying to get over his first surprise. "There was *some* truth in it, but there was a lot of sham. He does grudge the trouble; but he wouldn't let go *one stiver* of the money—no, not even Tom Hathaway's poor little popgun of a legacy, if by hook or by crook he could have collared it too!"

.
 "Oh, do, Jenny, not heap up such

an enormous fire, and knock the ashes about all over the place!"

Jenny's mamma spoke with a fretful intonation, which was obviously foreign to her nature and quickly repented of. "I know you mean well, my dear; and it is nice for your father to see a bright fire and a clean hearth when he comes in—especially on a night like this," glancing outside, for the shutters were not yet shut, and the street lamp opposite the window revealed the raw, murky atmosphere and reeking damp of a November evening—"but there's no need to waste——"

"I didn't mean to waste at all." Jenny, a tall girl of fifteen, plied tongs and shovel vigorously. "I shan't waste a single cinder; they shall all go on the top," protested she, suiting the action to the word. "But I know poor papa will come in cold and miserable, and you always

tell me to make the room look comfortable for him—to cheer him up and give him a welcome. I thought you liked a good fire,” in aggrieved accents.

“Yes—yes, my dear—yes, of course; I am not blaming you, only coals are such a terrible price; here is an enormous bill just come in;” the speaker sighed and glanced at a paper in her hands. “How it is ever to be paid, I am sure I don’t know!”

“But you knew it had to come, mamma.”

“I knew; but I hoped to get some others settled first. There are several that I have been keeping back; thinking that, as this was the last day of the month, your father would get his salary paid and I could ask him to let me have the money.”

“Well, can’t you, and leave the coals for a little longer?”

"Oh, yes, I *can*; in fact, I *must*"—again the speaker sighed and looked dejectedly round—"but I could hardly bear to see that great cart-load at the door to-day, just when the cook was telling me that she must have the plumber sent for to the kitchen range, and that something has gone wrong with the tap in the scullery too."

The door opened and another daughter entered.

"What a comfort to see a decent fire!" exclaimed she, popping down upon a stool in front. "I am so cold in this thin frock. Mamma, I suppose we may send for patterns of warm things now, mayn't we? You said if we hung on till the end of November we could get our winter frocks in time for Christmas. And I have been thinking——"

"Do you suppose you really must have them? There are so many of you, if we once begin; and now that

skirts are so wide they take such yards and yards of material——”

“I was going to say,” said Bertha, looking thoughtfully into the fire, “that if we could have some stuff for new blouses—some really good, nice-looking, warm material, velveteen or corduroy——”

“Corduroy is very expensive,” interpolated her mother.

“It would be nothing compared with the expense of coats and skirts such as other girls have. And we might manage to make our old skirts do by lining them with flannel or flannelette.”

“Oh, Bertha, mine could *never* do.” The younger and less considerate Jenny rushed into the arena with a terrified protest. “Mine is all stained and frayed,” cried she, exhibiting here and there the deficiencies indicated.

But Bertha was resolute. “It could be turned,” said she,

decidedly. "You could help to do it yourself, if we had some one in to make the blouses; we could easily work under her direction. But, mamma," in a lower voice, "I am afraid the little ones really must have some new underclothing. You know how Wynnne has been coughing all this week, and when I went into the nursery this morning, Jane told me she did not like to worry you, but that she was sure both the children were not properly clothed for this weather. She showed me their things——"

"They shall have what they require; I shall manage it somehow," said Mrs. Hathaway, hurriedly; "I have still something to sell," involuntarily turning round the diamond ring upon her finger. "Bertha—Jenny—not a word to your father—nor to the boys—nor anyone. At least we can spare them this. And if I should get enough,"

looking fondly at her sole ornament, "for you, my poor dears, to have——"

"Never mind *us*." Bertha came and threw herself across her mother's knees. "We can do very well. I didn't know it was as bad as that, mamma; only the poor children——"

"Yes, yes; you were quite right to tell me about them. If I were able to go into the nursery myself! But no one must think of keeping things back from me because of my being an invalid. It would make me worse—far worse—than anything else, to know that others were suffering from my neglect."

"Neglect! You did everything in the world for us as long as you could," said Bertha, in a choking voice, whilst Jenny, subdued, also leant tearfully against her mother's chair. "You worked and slaved for us," continued the elder girl, with breath coming and going fast, "sit-

ting up at nights, and staying at home all the fine summer days, and never taking a holiday, and always pretending that you were so well and strong, until you could pretend no longer——”

“Hush! hush! There is your father at the gate.” Mrs. Hathaway, who had been returning tenderly the kisses pressed upon her cheek, suddenly started upright, and dashed the moisture from her eyes. “He must not find us like this,” said she, briskly. “There is little enough in his own life to cheer and encourage him; and if he finds us *down* it will depress him the more, and unfit him for doing the work he has to do. He often has a headache when he comes in. That’s right, Bertha, go out and meet him; and, Jenny, dear, try not to bring forward unpleasant subjects; you know what I mean. You have not quite Bertha’s tact, though I know your

dear, warm heart would not for the world give anyone pain."

"But, mamma, is there any use in shirking?"

Mrs. Hathaway held up a warning finger, for the tones of a shrill young voice were somewhat too penetrating, and the front door had now admitted the master of the household.

Then the mother replied in a firm, steady undertone, "There *is* no use in 'shirking'—but neither is there any use in discussions which cannot further the object in view. When there is anything to be *done*, it would be foolish and cowardly, it would be wrong, to shrink from speaking out and taking counsel together; but merely to bewail our poverty, and indulge in useless aspirations and enumerations of things we need which we cannot get, and must learn to do without, is but waste of breath, and worse. By

overshadowing our spirits, and turning our thoughts downwards instead of upwards, this kind of talk interferes with our going through our daily work diligently, and meeting our troubles cheerfully. Now, run out and see what they are waiting in the hall for," proceeded the invalid, in a lighter tone; for Mrs. Hathaway was, for the time being, chained to the little hard couch which did duty for a sofa in her small, plainly-furnished drawing-room.

Mrs. Hathaway was one who practised what she preached, and in the few moments which elapsed ere figures were again seen in the doorway she had gathered strength from no unfamiliar Source, and composed her features to their usual gentle air of serenity and welcome.

She had made up her mind that the day had dragged as heavily with her husband as with herself.

It had been an especially trying

one from various points of view in the humble household. We have had a glimpse of its culminating scene; and there had been divers lesser annoyances to contend with, some of one sort, some of another; while, through all, there had grated harshly on the sensitive nerves of the poor prisoner, who could never escape out of hearing, the scrunching and snorting of a loathsome steam roller, which ground endlessly up and down over the newly-repaired suburban road in front.

Even her gentle soul had been stung to irritation at last, as we know, and the goodly hotbed of coals with which the small apartment was now glowing had nearly had their flames quenched by her at the outset.

That had passed, and she was now glad they were there; glad that her poor husband, coming in weary and chilled—too often downcast and dispirited also—but how was this?

It was certainly no downcast, dispirited countenance which met her timorous, faintly-investigating smile. It was a voice most unlike her poor Tom's usually subdued tones—(poor fellow! he had almost forgotten how to speak jovially)—which responded to her wifely inquiries. It was a brisk, alert, upright little grey-headed man who stepped into the room, and who laughingly threw off a couple of excited girls eagerly clamouring for the problem to be unravelled, and the secret, whose existence had been admitted, to be disclosed in the hearing of all.

“You shall hear it, sure enough.” The father and husband bent over the sofa for the never-failing embrace. “Jenny, love” — in his excitement the old name, which had of late been transferred to the younger proprietor, rose to Mr. Hathaway's lips; and he stroked

fondly the head that had once been as glossy and golden as the other Jenny's was now—"I have brought home a medicine that will go far to cure thy ailment, poor wife," and the speaker sat down beside the couch, and held out his other hand to the two impatient ones standing by.

At the same moment a boy burst in, laden with school books. Quick as thought, Bertha had turned round with an imperative sign, and opened her mouth to bid the intruder retire, when, "No, no," cried her father, beckoning Charlie also within the circle; "come in, my boy, come in. I've got a bit of good news to tell, and you shall hear it with the rest." Then he paused and looked solemnly, yet with radiance shining in his eyes, at each in turn. "A wonderful thing has happened," he said, "a most extraordinary and—and wonderful thing. I have

been left a legacy of a thousand pounds!"

.
"There seems no end to what it will do," cried Bertha, over and over again.

Twenty-four hours had passed, and each had been filled with its own measure of joyful communings and glad anticipations.

"Mamma, to think how nearly you had lost *that!*" continued the affectionate girl, touching the beautiful ring, whose diamonds seemed to emit a new effulgence—as indeed they did, for nothing would serve the enthusiastic Jenny but to clean and brighten them afresh in honour of the occasion. "Oh, mamma, perhaps only another day and it would have gone! The one jewel you possess in the world! And what we all know you value besides, because of so many associations. . . . Well, now, I have made out the list

of bills," and with tenfold the importance of a judge Bertha spread her papers, pencil in hand, "and we will pay every one of them first of all. They don't amount to much in the light of a thousand pounds," continued she, joyously, "although they seemed so overwhelming when we had only poor papa's salary to go upon, and they were to be scrimped one by one out of every month as it came in. Perhaps we may not even need to touch the thousand at all for the bills; as Mr. Mapleson wrote that there was a thousand 'odd,' and that 'odd' may quite likely cover the bills, papa thinks. And then we may use a hundred, may we not, in getting put to rights altogether? The house really wants it *dreadfully*——"

"Indeed, it does." But Mrs. Hathaway's acquiescence was rather one of pleased anticipation than of regret. "It ought to have been

painted from top to bottom last year. And had it not been our own we should have been forced to do it; no landlord would have let us off. We thought that was the one good thing about our having bought this poor little house and mortgaged it so heavily. We shall pay off the mortgage now," and she looked round with the air of a proud proprietor. "You must remember, children, that we shall not receive Mr. Grenoble's legacy at once; and though your father will have no difficulty in getting an advance on the security of Mr. Mapleson's letter, it will only be a few hundreds. Still, a few hundreds, and the rest to follow shortly!"—and her eyes shone.

"I was thinking we really ought to have a little household linen," meditated Bertha aloud. "The towels are so very thin, and there are hardly enough to go round——"

"And the water-cans are in a

deplorable state," assented her mother.

"And, oh, mamma, can't we have the piano tuned?" It was Jenny's turn next. "The tuner has not been here since April."

"You may send for him at once;" Mrs. Hathaway nodded cheerfully. "And poor Charlie's bed, I will have that mended. The poor boy never complains, but it must have been very uncomfortable. And the lock of his door is broken—Oh, there is your father's voice outside!" All paused to listen. "He has brought some one home with him," said Mrs. Hathaway, with a fresh smile. "He used often to bring a friend home in this easy way when we were first married; but it is so long since we have had anything to offer. That's right, Bertha, make a blaze," and she drew herself up on the couch, and arranged the coverlet over her feet to prepare for company.

She was hardly prepared, however, for the visitor who was ushered in. Although she knew Mr. Mapleson, she had not seen him hitherto within the walls of her own modest dwelling. Here also was a new departure.

“Mr. Mapleson was good enough to say he would come down with me and call upon you this evening, my dear.” It was natural that the speaker’s accents should have in them a certain formality in the presence of a stranger, but it did not escape the wife’s ear that there was also a nervous intonation and something of the well-known shadow on her husband’s brow. He now proceeded.

“Mr. Mapleson wished to consult with us both on a little matter of business——”

“An investment for the legacy left you by the terms of Mr. Grenoble’s will;” the lawyer took up the thread, and seated himself with a

courteous inclination towards the young lady who had hastened to place a chair.

“An investment?” Mrs. Hathaway looked from one to the other with feminine appeal for enlightenment.

“My wife does not understand much about such things; neither, to tell the truth, do I.” Mr. Hathaway forced a little laugh, which had not a genuine ring. “We did not quite understand, did we, my dear? that this money which our cousin has been kind enough to leave us has to be invested—will remain in Mr. Mapleson’s charge, to be invested for us—so we shall get the interest instead of the capital. Of course, it’s all right; no doubt it is better so; it will last longer, and——”

“But perhaps it is a little disappointment?” The visitor looked keenly round. “I dare say the ladies have already spent in imagination——”

"That's it; just so." The girls' father made a hasty movement, as though to intervene between their faces and the guest. "I was a little over-hasty in telling them; and they had been reckoning up, as young people will—but, of course, *we* understand," and the poor little man made a dignified movement and straightened himself upon the hearthrug.

"Yes, *we* understand." The voice from the sofa was low and soft, but no tremor was audible. ("A woman who would back up her husband in anything," decided Mr. Mapleson within himself.) "We are greatly obliged to you for taking this trouble," continued the speaker, steadily, "and shall be very glad of any help you can give us."

Mr. Mapleson produced some papers from his pocket. As he did so he heard a husky whisper behind his chair.

“Are we not to get *any* of it now, Bertha?” And looking up at the same moment the quick-witted lawyer perceived a spasm upon the father’s face, and noted that the mother had averted hers.

When they spoke, however, no one would have guessed the effort which shaped the syllables of calm propriety which fell from the elder’s lips. The papers were passed from one to the other. Mr. Mapleson’s proposals were hearkened to with deference; his advice was taken, and himself empowered to act in all respects according to his own judgment.

Still he did not go; he seemed unwilling to go. He entered into a discussion about the merits, or demerits, of the neighbourhood; his eye wandered round and round the little room, taking in—or at least so poor Bertha fancied—the shabby, darned curtains and broken window-

cord; and though there was more than one prolonged pause, it was not until all had begun to feel the strain almost beyond their powers to bear, that he at length rose.

"You won't stay to dine with us?" said Mr. Hathaway, faintly. He knew there would be a good dinner—the dinner which had been ordered to celebrate the family festival—and hospitality prompted the invitation, even while a sick sinking at the heart almost forbade its utterance.

All the glorious news of yesterday seemed to have turned to a mirage. It was true that forty pounds a year, which Mr. Mapleson considered would be the probable interest of the sum bequeathed, meant a pleasing addition to his annual income. But compared with a thousand pounds down!

The "odd," too, had faded out of sight. It had only amounted to a

trifle, and had been used for expenses. He was longing to be rid of another presence, yet shrank from the moment when he and his should be again alone. How happily had he gone forth that morning! How smoothly had the wheels of life rolled throughout the day! And how confidently had he awaited the glad bustle of his return!

It had been agreed that a family conclave was to be held, and pros and cons discussed. He could scarcely bear to mark the quietude of the little chamber now.

"Just step with me a moment outside, will you?" said Mr. Mapleson.

.
"But, my dear sir, I—I, really—I am so bewildered! This munificence—this extraordinary, unparalleled good fortune!" Poor Tom Hathaway shook all over, and a narrow slip of paper in his hand wriggled in the lamplight. "It is incredible—"

"Not at all incredible." A hearty hand patted him on the shoulder. "You think me a cold-blooded individual, Hathaway; and I dare say wouldn't give me credit for—but even a selfish old bachelor may sometimes enjoy giving a pleasant surprise. I didn't come all this way out to shed gloom and disappointment in a place that, to tell the truth, looks dismal enough without the need of anything additional," with an involuntary glance of disparagement at the sodden road and monotonous frontage.

("God bless my soul! How can people live in such a locality?" muttered Mapleson to himself.)

Then he continued his cheerful strain aloud, "Let me explain. I meant to have my little joke—to tease your wife and daughters for a few minutes, and then to produce this cheque and make them jump. But somehow I couldn't do it.

There was *that* in your wife's face—and those poor girls! Well, well, forgive my seeing below the surface, Hathaway; we lawyers can't help prying, you know; and even your mask of cheerful acquiescence didn't take me in. It was a disappointment, eh? I had guessed as much, but I didn't know *how* much until—never mind when. It made me feel queer, I can tell you. Now, my good sir, do you understand that this," tapping the cheque, "is your own earned money—(at least if it can be called 'earned,' " *sotto voce*). "Anyhow, it's made honestly,—and I had nothing to do with it beyond the fact that I was the medium of making it for you. Are you listening? I don't suppose you are," jogging his dumb companion playfully by the elbow. "But still, as you have got to tell others, you may as well let me tell you once again. On the day of Mr. Grenoble's death,

when I knew you would come in for this small legacy—small as compared with what he left his other relation, that grumbling curmudgeon Charles—the Stock Exchange was ‘humming’ with African shares. I made up my mind to have a fling on your account; and if it turned up trumps, well and good; if not, I guaranteed in my own mind to make good the loss. I had just done uncommonly well for myself in the same line, and could afford it. That was a week ago, and the result of the week is that your thousand has made five! I retain the original sum, to be invested according to Mr. Grenoble’s wishes—(which I explained just now to yourself and Mrs. Hathaway)—and for the other four thousand you hold the cheque in your hands. It is yours absolutely—and you can make ducks and drakes with it as soon as you like. Eh? Oh, never mind. No thanks. God bless you,

my dear fellow; God bless you," and with a parting grip of the hand the speaker vanished in the darkness.

Nor did the worthy Mapleson's kindness end here. He had received an impression from the visit never to be effaced. He took an ever-increasing interest in the affairs of the family he had befriended. In the course of time the schoolboy Charlie was received into his office; and one fine day when his nephew and heir, Herbert Mapleson, came and stood before him, bristling with resolution and defiance, to announce that he had offered his hand and heart to Bertha Hathaway, and that neither his people nor hers should put a spoke in his wheel, for marry her he would, &c., &c., with all the usual variations—all the formidable uncle did was to hear him to the end, and then say, with a smile which he could not for the life of him make sarcastic, "Bless my soul!

young man, do you think because people wear spectacles that they can't see an inch beyond their noses? There; get me my hat; and we will go off together to call upon my future niece. I am not such a fool, Herbert Mapleson, but I can still admire a pretty girl, and a good girl, when I see one. I shall have to make another fling one of these days on Tom's account," he cogitated. "It all came of that queer little legacy of his."

A CLERICAL EXTERIOR

A Clerical Exterior



"As for society, my dear fellow, ahem?" said the vicar, significantly. Then he looked at the youthful, serious figure before him, taking in its spare outlines, the slight bend of the neck and the length—the extreme length—of the new black coat. "Ahem!" he repeated. But inwardly he made the swift and cheerful reflection: "Quite presentable, but absolutely indifferent. Full of zeal and visions. An embryo Loyola or Damien, in short!" with a sarcastic quirk of the lip. "I know the cut. At the present moment it suits me down to the ground."

"I am not in the least solicitous about society," said the new curate, with gentle decision.

“No; I thought not. Society is—is all very well in its way; but when a man is beginning his life-work”—the speaker shot a glance and marked that it told—“society is more or less a hindrance. Later on it is a different matter. Your object now is to learn all you can, and do all you can; and this great teeming parish of mine, east of the East of London, will prove, I trust, an excellent master in the lesson. There is not”—he paused, then corrected himself—“there is hardly more than one house in it to be visited on equal terms.”

The curate did not even ask whose house it was.

A few days later, however, Mr. Fairclough himself suggested: “I must take you to call on Lady Margaret Whitmore, Bertram. Lady Margaret will expect it. She is not only my principal parishioner, but the largest landowner in the neighbourhood. An excellent woman—

liberal, benevolent. We are lucky in having such a person in this forsaken—I mean this queer, out-of-the-way part of the world. Every one else who has ever held property hereabouts has fled the scene; sold it for building purposes, and made off to happier hunting-grounds. The East End of London is not what you can call an agreeable vicinity, and the East End is approaching us Essex folk at a gallop. But Lady Margaret has struck her roots deep, like one of her own elms—too deep ever to be torn up; though one day doubtless she will snap at the stem, as they occasionally do. Long may that day be off! And meantime I must take you with me to Garfords, and present you in due form.”

“When shall we go, sir?” inquired the young man, glancing at a notebook in his hand. “I had better make a note of it——”

“Pooh! Note! Come along now,”

cried the vicar, with genial alacrity.

" 'Tis a nice day for a walk, and the walk to Garfords is the only decent one in the place."

"I am afraid this afternoon is full already. I had arranged to call at the schools——"

"My dear boy, the schools can wait."

"And to take these papers for the magazine——"

"Put them in your pocket, and if we have time we can hand them in as we return."

"You wished me to see about the special service——"

"Special service be——" Mr. Fairclough choked the word "hanged" in his throat. He was too apt to let fall unclerical expressions. Aloud, he merely remarked: "My dear Bertram, you are quite right, perfectly right, to map out your time and economize it. There is nothing like method, as I always

tell my curates; but all the same, there come occasions when method must go to the wall. It does not do to be a slave to red tape," jogging his young disciple's arm playfully. "I had got my day laid out as well as you, but the sun shines, the birds sing, and the upshot is—away with that note-book!" tapping it with his finger. "There is nothing in it that will not keep till to-morrow or next day; and away we go across the fields to the one house in the neighbourhood where there is the prospect of an hour's real enjoyment in the performance of an actual and positive duty visitation."

He seized his large, important, glossy hat with one hand and his silver-headed cane with the other. Bertram put on a smooth black wide-awake, and was extracting his umbrella from the stand when Mr. Fairclough, with half-humorous irritation, pushed it back.

“No, no; can’t stand that. An umbrella when there is not a cloud in the sky! In the month of June, too! Here,” opening a side door, (for the two were standing in the inner hall of the vicarage, a spacious, well-planned building, as many of its kind are in that region), “here, take your choice. Here are sticks of every sort: sticks long, sticks short; sticks lean, sticks stout; sticks rough, sticks smooth! Some of them haven’t been used for twenty years or more, but I go on collecting all the same. Aye, that one will suit you, I dare say; and you handle it as though to the manner born. Come, Bertram, I’ve see you know a good stick. Don’t tell me that you prefer to trudge along a country road with that infernal machine, a parson’s umbrella.”

“No, sir! I—I never walked with an umbrella in my life till I took orders. But I thought——”

the young man smiled suggestively.

"Aye, I know well enough what you thought;" Mr. Fairclough's eyes twinkled. "You are not the first. And, of course, you are quite right in a way, Bertram; the good folks down here have a great eye for the correct clerical exterior, and Lady Margaret and her daughters especially expect the clergy to be turned out *de rigueur*. But an umbrella, you know, an umbrella! The fact is, an umbrella is my *bête noire*, Bertram; and to tell the honest truth, if I dared I'd pitch both it and that black wide-awake of yours to the back of beyond, and see my curates go about clothed like other gentlemen."

"But, sir——"

"Oh, I know it can't be done, and, after all, it's a trifle, a mere trifle. Now, then, this way." And cutting short the discussion wherein he

feared he had been betrayed too far, the older pedestrian hastily opened a side gate, and after the two had passed through, and he had again secured its fastenings, was ready with a fresh topic of conversation. To himself he said, "I must take care not to shock this guileless youth. Suppose he does pin his faith on a coat or a collar, and suppose I have outlived that illusion, he would be none the better suited to this place and the work before him for adopting my views and discarding his own. As long as he does his part, and fights the world, the flesh, and the devil manfully, what odds if he chooses to *look* it in his own way? Lady Margaret, at any rate, will think none the worse of him." And he chatted sociably and pleasantly as they wended their way along.

"And so I needn't have got this beast of a hat after all," said Ber-

tram to himself. "Confound it, and the coat too! If I had only known!"

He had left Oxford one year before, had taken a good degree, and prepared with zest for the life of a hardworking parish clergyman. Of his own free will he had made this choice; had felt called to it; discovered himself suited to it; and from the bottom of his heart desired nothing better than to concentrate his energies and exercise his best powers in the sacred profession. But he was not quite the meek visionary nor the rapt enthusiast imagined by that very muscular Christian, the Rev. Augustus Fairclough.

"Mary, Mary, how exciting! Two men coming up the lane!" exclaimed the younger Miss Whitmore to her sister, as the two sat lazily upon the lawn at Garfords, with a litter of books and magazines around them. "Two men, actually! Who can they be? Who——"

Mary turned her head slowly, almost contemptuously, round. "It never *is* anybody, so what is the use of saying 'Who?' There is only Mr. Fairclough who it *can* be."

"Mr. Fairclough it is. And the new curate, as I'm a—what a pity mamma is out! She is the curate-lover in this house. We must see them though, and do the civil. After all, Mr. Fairclough would never bring any one here who was not passable, barely passable, even to please mamma. He knows what is due to us—to you and me—and that we can't stand grubs, whatever mamma can. I am rather glad we were at home now. We shall see if this new importation is likely to be any sort of good to us. If only he should be up to the mark for a dinner or a dance——"

"Nonsense!" Mary Whitmore made a restive movement. She was out-of-sorts that day; vexed be-

cause of a certain disappointment, and disinclined to put up with interruptions of her brooding mood. "As if a curate could be any good in that way!" she said, petulantly. "And you know what they are, as a rule. I don't know how they manage it, but directly they become rectors and vicars they are nice enough, and pleasant enough—but curates!" and her nose went up in the air.

"Still, he might do for a dinner," persisted the younger, "and I don't believe Mr. Fairclough would bring him to call if he would not do for a dinner. You know he has two other inferior creatures he never thinks of bringing."

"Oh, I don't know; they are all alike," said Mary, indifferently.

None of the indifference, however, was apparent when Miss Whitmore arose to greet her visitors. No one could ever accuse Lady Margaret's

daughters of ill-breeding; and certainly neither of the newcomers had any reason to suppose that they were grudged their share of the rustling shade, nor of the luxurious encampment on the velvet turf, which seemed created to invite repose.

"I have been telling Mr. Bertram that this is the one place in the neighbourhood where you may imagine yourself a thousand miles from London," began the vicar, laying down his stick, and spreading himself out comfortably. "The peace and stillness of Garfords is the one soothing oasis in my great bewildering desert of a parish. I come here when I want to forget where I live. Ah, how sweet those azaleas smell!" catching a whiff from a large clump near. "And the lilac and may too," sniffing about. "Delicious, the mingling of fragrance! And that white broom sweeping the water!" his eye going

down to a small lake embedded in shrubs. "This is really Paradise," concluded the speaker, taking off his hat, and burrowing down yet deeper in the basket-chair. "Bertram, I told you this was the day for the Garfords, did I not? Young ladies, I trust you will excuse us for breaking in upon the harmony of such an afternoon, but I think you will agree with me that when a man is to see Garfords for the first time, he ought to see it on a day like this? And now," more briskly, "now, pray, what is the news of the outer world? What have you been hearing? What are you reading?" picking up with the ease of friendship the nearest volume, and plunging instantly into a discussion of its merits.

The theme was interesting, and the young lady animated and intelligent. It only needed the murmur of other voices, and the perception that he was not required to stimu-

late a lagging dialogue on his other hand, to set the good-natured elderly gentleman free to pursue it; and he was presently so entirely absorbed as to forget any responsibility hitherto felt, connected with the visit.

All at once, however, Mr. Fairclough was startled. A clear, natural, hearty laugh rang out close to his ear. He broke off short in the very middle of a sentence, to turn a pair of round, surprised eyes upon Bertram.

Bertram was sitting upon the edge of his seat twirling his cane between his fingers, and from his parted lips had emanated a sound never heard before by his clerical superior.

There was nothing disagreeable in the laugh; it could not have been termed either impertinent or familiar; but it was undeniably spontaneous, frank, and mirthful; and somehow—though for the life of him

Mr. Fairclough could not have said how—it took him aback. A gentle, hesitating smile was the outside *he* had ever won from this pale-faced student; and though he had been at times a trifle impatient of such pertinacious solemnity, he had been impressed by it, and inclined to consider its effect upon his parishioners as distinctly advantageous.

What then was the meaning of this new departure? He literally stared, and let it be felt that he was staring.

Margaret Whitmore, who had been the cause of the laugh, and whose own merry eyes were dancing, caught her breath and almost, if not actually, apologised. Bertram's cane fell from his hands, and when he had recovered it, there was a suffusion of colour on his cheek which had certainly not been there before.

“I have been telling Mr. Bertram a story of one of our old farm

labourers," and the young lady, with somewhat hurried intonation, repeated the story,—but neither she nor her auditors felt moved to more than a mild appreciation of its flavour on this second narration.

"Ha! ha! ha! Very good!" Mr. Fairclough did indeed emit a faint, commendatory chuckle, and proceed to cap the anecdote on the instant,—but, though he was an excellent *raconteur*, and though his *mot* was superior to Miss Margaret's, he felt that he had not obliterated the memory of his own lapse, nor restored the comfortable unanimity which had preceded it.

If he had only had the sense to sit still and keep his ears open! As it was, he was perforce obliged to go on talking for the whole party, since the abashed Bertram could scarce lift up his head again, while Margaret Whitmore looked as if she too had met with a rebuke. Neither

recovered entirely throughout the remainder of the call. . . .

"Yes, you were; you were much too free. Mr. Fairclough thought so, and so did I," exclaimed Mary, afterwards. "Talking and laughing like that with a curate! Of course, the poor man had to laugh back—he could not help it—and then you saw the look he got."

"Gracious me! I saw the look, and I could scarcely believe my eyes. I thought it downright cruel; while as for the poor youth, he got as red as a rose. It was the greatest fun!"

"Fun? Nonsense! Mamma would have been very angry. You know how often she has told you not to be familiar all at once with strangers. The only thing that redeemed it was Mr. Fairclough's annoyance, and his look of blank amazement."

"And the dead stop he made," cried Margaret, with intense appreciation. "The sort of 'Good heav-

ens! What-is-going-to-happen-next?' expression on his face. Oh, it was glorious!" and she threw herself back in her chair, twisting her handkerchief into a ball, tossing it into the air, and catching it again. "I must prepare a few more such shocks for our venerable vicar," cried she. "I must lay in a store. After all, why shouldn't a poor young parson see a joke as well as other people? At first you may imagine how furious I was when I saw you had usurped dear old Mr. Fairclough, who is always worth talking to, and left me to struggle with the other. I, who had never been to a 'Mothers' meeting' or a 'Work party' in my life! I could just manage to be interested in the 'Lending Library,' because I thought it would be a good thing to clear the shelves of all our old magazines and useless books, now that we have got such a lot of new ones. We

want some more room, and there is a perfect accumulation. I told the youth I should look them out and send them down. Unhappily, there are no Lenten services nor anything of that sort to inquire about just now, and I could not venture into the realms of music and the choir boys. I had a flying shot at the *Parish Magazine*, but that soon dropped, so I made the most of the book-lending. The youth seemed pensively grateful, and we worried out the subject. You must have heard how solemnly we conversed. Then I tried him—feeling my way—on croquet and lawn tennis. If you will believe me, a spasm of disgust shot across his face at the words! At this point I felt reckless; I let myself loose to talk as I chose, and would no longer attempt to adapt my conversation to my company, as mamma and you think one ought to do. I just *gave* it him! I told him all we were

doing and all we were going to do. I didn't care whether he liked it or not. Probably he thinks me an appallingly worldly and frivolous young lady. I ran on exactly as if he had been any other young man, and he bent his gentle head and let the torrent flow over it. But when I got to old Trueman's idea of the Jubilee procession, it found the spot, like Homocea. Some time or other, in the Dark Ages, this spiritual being must have known what it was to laugh, and ever since there has been—there must have been—a pent-up laugh somewhere. Mary, do you know, I am rather proud of myself for having pricked that hidden spot."

"I don't know what you are talking about," said Mary, fretfully. "Here is mamma at last. Perhaps ——" She rose from her chair and stood for a moment ruminating.

"Perhaps what?"

"All that we need to say to mamma is that Mr. Fairclough brought the new curate to call, and that he seems gentleman-like." Again she hesitated. "A man of that sort would be so very useful," she murmured, in conclusion.

"And mamma likes them cadaverous," cried Margaret, gaily. "Mamma!" springing forward and getting her voice in first, as the mother's pet had a trick of doing. "Mamma, you're in luck. Mr. Fairclough has got a curate after your own heart. I don't know if he parts his hair down the middle, because he kept on his abomination of a hat all the time he was here, though I am sure he was longing to take it off, as Mr. Fairclough did his. But in every other respect Mary and I can testify that he meets your views, and we foresee that you will have him here morning, noon, and night. He is 'just sweet,' as

they say in America. Now, Mary, tell the truth, is not this Mr. Bertram 'just sweet'?"

Lady Margaret looked from one daughter to another.

"I passed the gentlemen at the lodge; I am sorry to have missed them."

"Of course you are," cried the irrepressible younger, "but you will be glad to hear that we did your part handsomely—gave them tea, cooled them down, lent the young man a book, and stuck a flower in the old one's button-hole."

"Silly child!" But even Lady Margaret smiled a fond rebuke. There were few people who could resist winsome Margaret—least of all Margaret's mother. She had, however, a word apart with her elder daughter presently.

"This Mr. Bertram, I suppose you really did approve of him?"

"There was nothing to disapprove."

"He seemed a gentleman?"

"Oh, yes, a gentleman."

"Well, my dear?"

"Well, mamma, there is nothing more to say."

"Then I shall ask him to dinner at once."

"Ask him as soon as you like; only——"

"Have you anything whatever against the man?" demanded Lady Margaret, impatiently. "Why can you not be open about it if you have? You may surely speak to me, confide in me."

"I have nothing to confide, and I have nothing against Mr. Bertram whatever—only Margaret is so young and silly." Margaret's mother understood in an instant.

"She might just try to make a fool of the poor man for the fun of it," proceeded the elder sister, now that the ice was broken. "You know how heedless she is. She calls him

a 'youth,' but he is older than she, at any rate. And I could not help fancying once or twice that I saw him looking at her. Mamma, it would be a shame to run any risk of turning that poor curate's head, and yet to say anything to Margaret—!" Finally a plan of campaign was arranged.

By the end of the summer Bertram had become quite an *habitué* of the house, firmly established in the good graces of all, and, as her daughters had predicted, a special favourite with his hostess.

"Yes, I thought you would like him," observed the vicar, complacently, one day. "An excellent fellow, and throws himself into his work like a man. The only fault I have to complain of—if it be a fault, Lady Margaret—is that Bertram does not seem to know what relaxation is! I have suggested his taking a holiday more than once; or even a day or

two off,—but he does not see it at all. He will be invaluable to me as the winter comes on; the people adore him already; and I am grateful to you for all the kindness he has met with at Garfords.”

“Indeed, Mr. Bertram is quite an acquisition,” rejoined Lady Margaret, briskly. “He has come out so wonderfully of late; and though we really do not see very much of him, that only proves that he is, very properly, too much engaged in parish work to have time for dawdling in ladies’ drawing-rooms. When we *do* see Mr. Bertram, he is always welcome.”

“A good preacher too, I think, Lady Margaret?”

“A remarkably good preacher, Mr. Fairclough.” (“A great deal better preacher than you are yourself,” reflected the lady, inwardly. She did not over-rate her vicar’s powers in that respect.)

"And a good reader, moreover, I think you will also allow?"

"The best reader we have ever had," said Lady Margaret, with animation.

"I am delighted with your approval," said the vicar, rising. "Your judgment was all that I needed to confirm my own. We have got a treasure, and I only hope we shall keep him. Bertram dines with you to-night, he tells me?"

"To meet my future son-in-law, Captain Satterthwayte," said Lady Margaret, shaking hands. "Captain Satterthwayte has just returned from a voyage, and comes to us to-night; and as the young people have not met for some time, I thought it would be more agreeable to have one other gentleman present, so that Margaret and I should not be quite neglected," with a smile. "The marriage will take place, we hope, next month."

"*Who* is to be there?" cried Bertram, with almost a shout, when, in the course of the next hour, the name of Lady Margaret's other guest was casually let fall by his superior.

The tone of his voice recalled something to Mr. Fairclough's ear, and pondering upon it afterwards he knew what that something was; it was the laugh which had startled him out of his equanimity on the lawn at Garfords five months before.

Since then he had, it is true, grown to recognise the fact that Bertram could laugh, even to anticipate with a pleasurable emotion the response which a droll anecdote or lively narration was sure to call forth when the pensive curate was off his guard—when he could be, as it were, surprised into mirth. But Mr. Fairclough had always felt that it required himself as instigator to produce the genial spark. Ber-

tram's present animation was a puzzle not to be solved by a somewhat elaborate and incoherent explanation.

"He is a very good fellow, but certainly he is rather a queer fellow at times," muttered the vicar to himself.

Still queerer would he have thought the young man could he have peeped into the curate's dressing-room as the evening hours drew on.

Bertram was rocking himself to and fro on a little creaking chair that threatened every minute to give way beneath the strain. Coats and waistcoats lay about at random, and the heavy boots, which had just been kicked off, betrayed, by their distance from their owner, the force with which they had been sent flying. The curate's usually sleek brown hair stood on end fierce and rumpled; his hands clasped his

knees, and he rocked and groaned in unison.

"Oh, you fool—you fool! You incarnate idiot! You double-distilled idiot, Jack Bertram! To go and let yourself in for this! How are you going to get out of it? You're not going to get out of it at all. . . . You have just *done* for yourself, intolerable jackass that you are!" . . . Another groan and rock. "After all the wear and tear of it, to end in this! And you knew what it must come to—you knew it all along, you tenfold son of a——! . . . Oh, hold your tongue now, and eat your pie, and be hanged to you! . . . It's the end, I tell you—the end. The game's up. You've played it well—too well, by a long chalk. Every week has let you deeper and deeper into the mire, and now—the deluge!"

"Heigho!" With a long sigh the speaker rose at last and walked to

the mirror on the wall. "He said I had 'the face for it'—and, by Jove! he was right! Never more so than to-night! Lady Margaret will press on me an extra glass of wine, and implore me to wrap my throat up from the night air. Mary Whitmore will condescend to suggest that I should take the warm side of the table at dinner—and Margaret? Margaret will be really anxious, and give me one of her troubled looks. Poor darling! She doesn't like it any more than I do, now. It was only a joke at the first. Good heavens! why did we let it get into such deadly earnest? Lady Margaret will never forgive us—never! And if we had only not behaved like two romantic lunatics, we might now have been as happy as Frank Satterthwayte and his Mary. I can pitch into Frank, anyway," he wound up with gloomy vengeance.

The gloom, however, did not

interfere with Mr. Bertram's being turned out faultlessly when, his toilet complete, he betook himself to the house where, according to his own sensations, the bomb was to burst.

He knew his old chum Satterthwayte, knew that it was beyond the power of mortals to divine what that honest sailor would or would not do at any given moment, more especially beneath the spur of unwonted exhilaration and joyous excitement. A thousand to one in the first flush of re-union with his betrothed, he had laid bare without a thought of harm the scheme concocted by the two in a giddy moment, and adhered to by Bertram at first on account of its plausibility and simplicity—afterwards, because he had no choice.

If Satterthwayte had told? He felt that he should know the moment the drawing-room door opened, whether Satterthwayte had told, or not.

The room seemed to spin round, and——

“Oh, Mr. Bertram, I wish I had sent the carriage for you,” exclaimed Lady Margaret’s voice in its most gracious accents. “I am so sorry. It could so easily have called for you when Captain Satterthwayte was fetched from the station. And you look so tired to-night;” he was pale and shaking, bewildered too by a sense of reprieve, and a desperate anxiety to turn it to account. “You must have the carriage to take you home,” concluded Lady Margaret, in her kindest manner.

She thought that his lips murmured gratitude. He himself did not know what they said.

When Captain Satterthwayte came down, big, bronzed, and bearded, making the furniture rattle as he burst in, and betraying no less his surprise than his satisfaction at the sight of the guest whom Lady Mar-

garet had risen to present, Bertram's face was a sight to see. Happily in real life such a face does not attract the attention it ought to do, and aware of this, the young man was possibly even afraid that it might not be significant enough. He clutched the other's hand, and wrung it in an agony.

Then he saw that all was so far safe, as the sailor, tenderly withdrawing his wounded member, eyed it and him alternately. The look said: "I understand. But you need not have broken my wrist, all the same."

"I did not know you two were acquainted," said Lady Margaret, taking the young clergyman's arm, and letting him lead her—as by virtue of his cloth she loved to do—to the head of her table. "We have never heard you mention Captain Satterthwayte. But then, of course," answering herself, "we

may never have mentioned Captain Satterthwayte to you." Then she let the subject drop; it was not one likely to interest Mr. Bertram.

She congratulated herself, however, on the coincidence. It was quite a lucky hit her having made the addition to their party, especially when it proved that the young men had not only been schoolfellows, but had kept up a close friendship—as close a friendship as circumstances permitted—ever since; Bertram had stayed at Sir Philip Satterthwayte's—and apparently Sir Philip had a warm regard for his son's friend—there were hints about the family living which Lady Margaret could hardly comprehend.

The hints, it is true, were all on one side. Captain Satterthwayte was bubbling over with them, and with arch significance. But it did seem odd that if there were anything of that kind in prospect, no

one at Garfords should ever have heard Mr. Bertram so much as mention the name of Satterthwayte. She must talk the matter over with Mary, and find out if Mary could throw any light upon it.

Mary was sitting upright as usual, immaculate in dress and demeanour as usual, but there was a soft light in her blue eye, and a smile upon her lips which was not often there. Lady Margaret was herself conscious of an expansion of the heart beneath the jolly uproar which made itself felt wherever Frank Satterthwayte was to be found. It would have been natural that Margaret also should have shared the general animation, but Margaret, strange to say, was out of spirits and paler than her wont. Margaret's mother could only suppose that her darling, like poor dear Mr. Bertram, was feeling tired; possibly a little overdone with too long a ride in the afternoon; and

as she looked from one to the other, the robust dowager wondered what young people could be made of nowadays.

Still the dinner passed off cheerily, and in due time came to a close. The ladies rustled away, the door was shut behind them, and Bertram, with a new expression, turned and faced his friend.

"Good heavens! Frank, it has been a close thing! Why didn't you let me know you were coming? I have been expecting you for weeks; and then to be taken by surprise at the last!"

"Very jolly surprise," said the sailor, coolly. "Nice to meet old friends on the first day of one's return. Well, and how goes it?" dropping significance and smiling frankly. "How has it turned out? You seem quite at home here, and all that. And my respected mother-in-law-to-be beams upon you

through her eyeglasses as I hoped and expected she would. Well, and Margaret? Am I to congratulate you and Margaret? You didn't look quite the engaged couple to-night, to be sure—I might say that one wore a more hang-dog expression than the other,—but that's a detail. Come, out with it! Is it all right?"

"All right?" echoed Bertram, bitterly. "Frank, if you had known what you were doing, or if I had known what I was doing, when you planned and I agreed to carry out this devilish plot——"

"Devilish! Oh, come, Bertram!"

"I say it *is* devilish. It was of the devil's own making. He employed you to tempt me; and me again to tempt Margaret. We should never have thought of such a thing for ourselves. And you, Frank—you, who are as open as the day, to suggest that I should play the hypocrite——"

"All's fair in love and war, you know," said Frank, a trifle uneasily. "I—upon my word, I thought I was doing you a good turn. It seemed to me there was no chance for you, unless you crept up Lady Margaret's sleeve, and we all know her ladyship's proclivities. She adores parsons—but they must be parsons of a certain cut—at any rate, while they are on their promotion. As you had decided on becoming a parson before ever you met Margaret Whitmore, I saw no harm in your suiting yourself to the taste of Margaret's mother in the cut of your jib, and all that goes with it. Then we agreed that it would be best to begin the acquaintanceship on that level, and not refer to a certain jolly Oxford week, and a subsequent meeting at Henley, when Margaret was under other chaperonage. Her mother never cares to hear about that summer, as it is. She thought Miss Meg

got out her horns too far, and had too good a time altogether. Even Mary—my beautiful Mary—shakes her elder-sisterly head over the want of starch in poor little Maggie's nature. They would have been horrified had they known *all* that went on, eh, Bertram? That moonlight night on the river—and the couple that were left behind on the island—eh? We won't talk about it. Why, what's the matter? You're not going to funk now, are you? Now, when we've brought it all so nearly to a conclusion—a glorious conclusion? You've played your part——”

“And taught her hers,” said Bertram, suddenly rising and flinging himself into a fresh attitude like a man stung beyond endurance. “Do you know, Frank—it's almost incredible—but I swear to you that until I saw you here to-night, or even until I heard you speak just

now, the whole black hypocrisy of this detestable proceeding never once showed itself before my eyes. Margaret and I fell in love with each other as a boy and girl will do in the course of a few days—almost within a few hours. One long summer evening, and the thing was done—”

“Very natural, I’m sure. Did it myself at your age.” The bearded sailor nodded approval.

“Oh! but hear me out, and don’t jest,” quoth poor Bertram, writhing in the pangs of a tardy awakenment. “You are older than I, and know the world. I was your little chap at school, and you were good to me. And I would have licked the blacking off your shoes—you know I would. You’ve always meant to be my friend, Frank; and you meant it for the best when you cautioned me that if once a whisper of that happy time reached the ears of Margaret’s mother it would never be anything

but a memory—a wretched, sorrowful memory—for us both.”

“True bill,” said Captain Satterthwayte, complacently, “I did.”

“And you suggested that we should both drop all appearance of ever having met before, when I came here to learn parish work as Mr. Fairclough’s curate. That I should be introduced as a perfect stranger to Lady Margaret and her daughters, and make my way with them until—oh, Frank, why did you do it—why—why *did* you do it?” On a sudden a groan that was almost a sob burst from the young man’s lips, his head fell down upon his hands, and the tremor which shook his slender frame betrayed the strength of the emotions within.

The cigar fell from between Frank Satterthwayte’s fingers.

“Why did you do it?” repeated Bertram, in a fierce undertone. “You might have seen, you might

have guessed what it would lead to. It has been a lie from beginning to end. We have never met, she and I—never interchanged a word or look—never touched each other's hand in the presence of a third person, without acting a falsehood. And the worst of it is that I do not believe either of us has realised this! I doubt if we have not even looked upon it as legitimate and romantic. It has been a pleasant pastime. Sometimes I have felt as if the edge of the precipice were perhaps rather too thin, but the very danger was exhilarating,—while as for Margaret, the poor guileless child, she thinks it must be right because *I* approve! God forgive me! Her crime lies at my door as well as my own."

"Come, come, this—this is all nonsense, you know, Bertram." Captain Satterthwayte pulled himself together and shook off an uncomfortable sensation. "You are

growing the least little bit absurd, don't you think? Call a trifle like this a 'crime'? Oh, come, you know," laying a remonstrating hand on the other's shoulder, "I expect my sudden appearance on the scene gave you a bit of a shake; and you thought that perhaps I, in the exuberance of this merry meeting, might have blurted out the truth to Margaret's sister."

"Would to heaven you had!"

"Would to heaven I had?" Satterthwayte stared. "And pray, why?"

"Because it would have saved me from doing so," said Bertram, slowly, "to Margaret's mother."

"Humph! That's it, is it? I suppose you know," looking at him keenly, "what the upshot of such a move would be?"

"I know. Yes. I have been knowing for the last hour. I am going now," with a move towards the door, "to do it."

For the moment it seemed as if he were to be allowed to do it. Then with a hasty step Satterthwayte was between him and the door handle.

"Look here, Jack. I don't want you to ruin yourself, and lay the blame on my shoulders! As you listened to me once—perhaps to your cost—you are bound to listen again."

"I am not bound."

"You are, and don't be a fool." He was pushed gently backwards towards the fireplace. "This is a bad business, I allow. I didn't think the thing out, when I let you in for it. But it's done, and can't be undone. You have Margaret to consider as well as yourself. The poor girl is head and ears in love, as anyone can see—anyone at least with half an eye—a thing which, begging her pardon, Margaret's lady mother does not possess; but I hold the key which will unlock her ladyship's

heart. It was to put this into your hands," with slow, deliberate emphasis, "that I came down upon you so sharp to-night. I would not wait to write. And besides, I wanted to be in at the death. Do you take me?"

"No," said poor Bertram, bewildered. "But, for God's sake, Frank, don't propose any more——"

"I am not going to propose anything. It is you who are going to propose;" the jolly sailor laughed with keen enjoyment of his own quip. "You shall make two proposals before this evening is over, my dear fellow. You shall go to Lady Margaret as vicar-designate of Satterthwayte—aye, you may jump, but the old boy has given his word that he will retire in six months, and my father has given his that you shall have the living. Eh! D'ye hear that? It's true, and you may believe it; so that long physiognomy

of yours may shorten again. The living of Satterthwayte is good enough for anyone to marry upon, and though our good hostess may be taken aback for a moment, I shall be astonished if between us we cannot work upon her to consent to your speaking to Meg this very night. Think of it, Bertram! By George! You shall go home an engaged man! And though it would be too much to expect that we should have both weddings on the same day, still, by the spring, when you are installed parish priest among the old folks at home, and take possession of your pretty vicarage, it could be made ready for a bride; and I might leave my wife with her sister if I have to be off to sea again. At any rate, I fancy it would weigh something with my future mother-in-law that in years to come her girls would no more be separated than in years past. The vicarage is

actually within the park palings, you know,——”

“Stop,” said Bertram, hoarsely. As the other spoke he had been looking from side to side with the air of a hunted animal round whom the toils were gathering fast, and twice had opened his mouth to speak, and twice had closed it again. Both hands were fast clenched. “Stop—tempter.” Then with instant compunction: “No, no, Frank, I did not mean it. Forgive the word. But, Frank, you who are an honest fellow, do you know what you are doing? You have drawn a picture”—his eyes gleamed; “it would be simply *everything* to me,” he murmured. “I love you and yours. I love that part of the country. I hope and trust I could do my duty among you all, and yet be myself—my own true self as you have known me in years gone by. And with Margaret for my wife——”

"You would be as happy as the day is long. All right. I thought you'd see it so. Well, now, you can't reproach me any more——"

"I said 'Stop,' " said Bertram, in a low voice. "Have you thought of the price which has to be paid for it all?"

"The—price?"

"I am to go to Margaret's mother with a lie in my hand. I, a Christian gentleman! A man who has taken upon himself to live a higher life even than that of ordinary Christians! I am to——"

"Cock-a-doodle-doo-o-o! Cut it, Jack! Don't let us in for any more of that high falutin rot. You are simply to go on as you are doing. To be as you have been for the past four or five months. Some day or other, when all is squared up between you two, Margaret may confess——"

"Margaret? Poor child! You

think I would be a coward, too, Frank?"

"Confess yourself, then, if you like the job. Only take your own time and place. When the engagement is given out and everybody has heard of it, you will have Lady Margaret at your mercy. She wouldn't dare back out. And though you might, and probably would both have a *mauvais quart d'heure*, you could look on that as the proper penance for your iniquity, if you're so keen on penance. I should wait till Mary was out of the way," added the speaker, after a pause. "It would be easier for Margaret. And if you like to depute me to break it to my girl, I think I could manage her," he concluded, with the confidence of a happy lover.

There was a long silence. Each knew that the crucial moment had arrived. "If he is obstinate now," quoth Frank Satterthwayte to him-

self, "Heaven have mercy on us both!" He would not try another syllable of argument; he felt he had said all he could say. And now?

Bertram's features, drawn and stiffened, repelled alike sympathy and counsel. It was plain that the fight within must be fought out by himself alone.

Only a few minutes by the clock ticking on the mantelpiece, yet to each the interval seemed an age, ere by a sudden electrical shock the eyes of both flashed into each other, and something very like an oath escaped from the lips of one. Bertram simply nodded his head, and walked from the room.

Captain Satterthwayte lit another cigar. "I shall hear him go out of the front door presently," muttered he.

.

How it all ended has long been a matter of history. No one beyond

the initiated few ever heard the tale of that strange evening at Garfords—that evening which brought to light such surprises for all; which began with such suffering and humiliation, such storm and stress, and ended in such a heaven of peace and joy.

Bertram himself felt as if another Power than his own were at work on his behalf; as if the victory which he had gained in that dumb struggle with his baser self had expiated after some fashion of its own all that had gone before, and rendered him strong to brave the downfall of his hopes, as well as the scorn and reproaches which he too well knew would deservedly fall to his share.

He went into Lady Margaret's presence prepared for this—prepared for everything. In his heart there was but one thought, to confess his fault without an iota of reservation, and to take upon his own head the

blame of it in every respect. He would not mention Frank Satterthwayte's name, and he would plead for Margaret; a stab went through his heart when he guessed how it would be when he began to plead for Margaret. He would be desired not to mention the name of Lady Margaret Whitmore's daughter. He would be accused, and rightly, of perverting her conscience and her judgment. He would have his holy profession thrown in his teeth—rightly also. He would be bidden to leave the house, and have it hinted that he would do well to withdraw from the neighbourhood also.

Would Lady Margaret insist upon Mr. Fairclough's being informed of his curate's disgraceful conduct? He felt that he would have to obey any demands and comply with any terms dictated. It all passed through Bertram's mind like a flash of revelation as he walked across the

short space between the doors of the two rooms. But he never wavered. One moment he stood still, his hand upon the door handle. One quick sigh escaped as a burst of sweet music from within assailed his ears; and one upward glance implored pity and aid for a poor soul in its extremity, and then——

“Lady Margaret,” said Bertram, walking up to a distant armchair, “would you be good enough to grant me a few minutes’ private conversation? May we retire into the back drawing-room?”

Looking back, he beheld the scene with dazed and incredulous eyes. Lady Margaret’s start of surprise; next her gracious signification of assent; then her frozen muteness of amazement; finally—what took place finally he could scarce, even in the retrospect, behold at all. Could it have been his own voice which so steadily proclaimed his own base-

ness? Could it have been he himself who so unflinchingly painted its darkest colours, and called upon his auditor to note how black they were? He had hidden nothing, extenuated nothing,—and through it all a rigid, upright figure sat and listened as though petrified. When the end came he waited in vain for the pent-up outburst which must follow.

Then he realised that Lady Margaret was a woman of a finer nature than he had given her credit for being. She would not stoop to add her reproaches to his own. It was sufficient that he had abased himself; she would not heap added humiliation upon his head. He perceived that he was to be allowed to depart without further torture.

And he had turned to do so, and even advanced a pace towards retreat, when a thin hand was put out with a motion of arrest, and a faint, quavering voice—curiously unlike

Lady Margaret's voice—pronounced his name. Looking round he saw, not the stately lady of the manor, the awe-inspiring mistress of Garfords, but an old, old woman, with tears running down her cheeks.

"Stay a moment, sir, until—until I am able to speak." Then the jewelled hand beckoned him to approach, and with faltering steps he obeyed. Lady Margaret was seeking for her handkerchief; seeking hither and thither in vain. Bertram, with the gesture of a son, drew an unfolded one from his pocket and reverently tendered it. As he did so, she caught him fast, as though afraid he would again essay to depart, ere she could compose her broken breath and subdue the quivering muscles of her face. He wondered what was coming—what could be coming?

And at length—marvel of marvels—a whisper the most extraordinary,

the most incredible, fell upon his ear. Was it Lady Margaret speaking? Or was it a Diviner Voice which breathed through her lips the words just faintly audible: "If ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses."

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Nor from that moment, nor to the very end of her days, was the subject ever again alluded to by Bertram's mother-in-law. Where Lady Margaret forgave, she forgave freely; when she trusted, she trusted implicitly. Bertram's voluntary confession, supplemented as it was by Captain Satterthwayte's account of his own share in the affair—an account which in justice it should be said was rendered with strict truthfulness, Frank having been more impressed than he cared to own by the example of his friend—all so wrought upon a nature nobler than

the world had ever guessed it to be, and upon a spirit genuinely influenced by the great doctrines of Christianity, that in her anxiety to restore the penitent to himself, to mark her appreciation of the true worth of his character, and to show that its solitary lapse from integrity was to be no bar to her renewed and even deepened esteem, Lady Margaret evinced an overflowing tenderness of generosity which amazed all who knew her.

Bertram became her favourite son-in-law, albeit she soon discovered him to be by nature the merriest, lightest-hearted fellow alive. She secretly comforted herself for this by the reflection that, in spite of all, he still did undeniably possess a clerical exterior.

ONLY KITTY

Only Kitty

A "KODAK" OF LONDON LIFE



Kitty was pretty,
And Kitty was witty,
But Kitty, alack! was only Kitty.



It was "only Kitty" who had received such a very odd invitation, that all the feminine heads of the family were gathered together to smile over the letter which conveyed it. If it had been either of the two elder Miss Masterdons who had been invited to spend a month in Gordon Square, Bloomsbury, during the height of the London season, all concerned would almost have felt as if Maud and Ethel had been insulted. Maud and Ethel were such very grand young ladies.

But now that it was only Kitty to whom kind old Mrs. Benetfink—(the wealthy and worthy kinswoman whom no one wished to offend, but whom it was sometimes rather awkward to evade)—had extended the finger of hospitality, Mrs. Masterdon and her daughters looked at each other, as we have said, with a smile, while Kitty raised a shout of joy.

“Oh, let me go! Let me go!” cried she, prancing up and down. “Father, say I’m to go,” darting up to the old squire, who, all unconscious, placidly opened the door of the room. “Father, do be on my side,” seizing him by the arm and shaking it vigorously. “You know you always are on my side, aren’t you? And if you say I am to go, mother won’t refuse.”

“Eh?” said he, stopping short, and looking from one to the other. “What?”

“Oh now, father, do promise me

before they begin. Don't listen to anyone but me. You say that I'm to go,—"

"But how *can* I say? I—upon my word—I don't know what it is all about. Do some of you explain." And the poor gentleman looked round for aid; though it is noteworthy that he did not attempt to shake off the vehement little gadfly which had fastened upon him. "What is she rushing at me like this for?" he demanded, finally.

"It is only Kitty, you know," began his eldest daughter, with the usual condescending intonation. "She always flies into a fever about everything. Kitty, don't worry father. Of course he will agree to whatever mother thinks right."

"Oh, of course!" assented he, with a touch of quiet grimness.

"And so if you will let mother think it over, and not be in such a hurry, I dare say you will get what

you want. It is an invitation from Mrs. Benetfink, father."

"Mrs. Benetfink? Oh!"

"She wants Kitty to go to her next Monday to spend a few weeks."

"A month," bursts in Kitty

"A few weeks or a month," amended the narrator. "It is really very kind of Mrs. Benetfink, and well meant, and all that; and, of course, she does not know any better."

"Know any better?" echoed Kitty's little shrill voice.

"Oh, we all know how you feel!" continued Miss Maud, not unkindly. "You are wild to go anywhere and everywhere. It's all one to you whether it is Belgravia or Bloomsbury, Mayfair or Wapping; I believe you would cheerfully start for Bethnal Green to-morrow if anybody would put you into the train."

"Well, well, it's only Kitty," quoth Mrs. Masterdon, with the

usual half indulgent, half contemptuous smile, "and she is so young and inexperienced!"—Kitty nodded delightedly at each adjective—"that all neighbourhoods are alike to her. And really it does not matter, you know, where an *un-come-out* girl goes"—pausing for reflection.

"I think she ought to go," said Ethel, slowly. Ethel's decisions were final at Monk's Cary. Kitty nearly fell at her sister's feet.

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Mr. and Mrs. Masterdon, albeit people of family and fortune, had no town-house of their own, and were indisposed to rent one, and undergo all the fatigue and turmoil of the London season during the months of the year when their own beautiful country-seat was most congenial to them, and when the effort was not absolutely necessary from other motives than those of enjoyment.

According to their views—or, to

be strictly correct, according to Mrs. Masterdon's views—it would have been their bounden duty to make an annual move as soon as the ages of her daughters seemed to demand recognition, had she not by good hap been exempt from pressing the point in the case of her eldest, who had been engaged and married—married handsomely, too—before ever she had been presented at Court.

A few county balls and shooting dinner parties had done the business almost ere the young lady's parents themselves had opened their eyes to the fact that there was a suitor in the case; and since then there had always been Lady Latimer's house in South Street for Maud and Mabel to resort to when the month of May came round.

Letitia was well pleased to have her sisters. She was an amiable girl, perfectly well-conducted, perfectly satisfied with her own position, and

benevolently ready to do what she could towards helping the younger ones to similar good fortune.

Her husband, usually called "Little Bob," was a good-natured, gossipy little fellow, with plenty of friends, nothing to do, and all day to do it in.

To the care, then, of this young couple Mrs. Masterdon was well pleased to despatch her daughters whenever they desired to exchange the woods and fields of Monk's Cary for the glitter and gloss of Rotten Row, the while she herself remained behind to attend to her flower borders, cut her lavender, and dry her rose-leaves; and on the occasion with which this little story opens, Maud and Ethel were just preparing to depart for their annual sojourn.

"I shall go up with you when I go to Mrs. Benetfink's," said Kitty, gleefully. "I shall go with you as far as the station,—but I sha'n't want

you a bit beyond. Mrs. Benetfink is going to send her own carriage for me, and I shall drive off in it all by myself; and then I'm to see no more of you all the time I'm in Gordon Square—isn't that it? You won't come prowling after me, and wanting to know what I'm doing, and where I'm going?" (She did not perceive the covert amusement in two pairs of eyes as she spoke.) "Because, you know, though I am very fond of you both, I do want to be quite on my own *hook*," pursued she, anxiously. "I think it will be such fun; and I think it's a splendid idea not to tell Mrs. Benetfink anything about your being up, if we can only keep from meeting; and London is such a very big place that I dare say we shall be able to manage that," she added, reflectively; "though, of course, I shall see you sometimes in the Park—but oh, I say, Maud," breaking off short,

“what if Mrs. Benetfink sees you too?”

Maud took her sister's hand. “Now, Kitty, listen; and try to be a little grown-up, and reasonable, and sensible. Though you are only seventeen, you are not a child; and you can surely begin to understand things. We think it will be easiest to say nothing about our being in Town; but if Mrs. Benetfink recognizes us anywhere when she is out driving with you, all you need say is that we are staying with Letitia, and that you will write and let us know if she would like us to call. Don't do this unless you are obliged,” emphatically. “You see, Mrs. Benetfink is not quite—quite——”

“Oh, I know she's rather vulgar!” said Kitty, frankly. “*I* don't mind; but I dare say Letitia would curl up sometimes. I'll take care,” nodding merrily. “We vulgarians sha'n't cross the path of you

grandees. We are going to enjoy ourselves in our own way; and we don't want *you*, any more than you want *us*; and if I pass you sitting aloft behind your powdered and cockaded men when I am in my humbler carriage, I shall just wink to you and grin to myself as I go by."

"For goodness' sake, don't wink, Kitty!"

"Mayn't I wink? Well, then, I shall give you a *fearfully* knowing look, and you shall see that I am laughing to myself. Or, suppose I drop my parasol between Mrs. Benetfink and you, and make a face like this," puckering up her mouth, "for your and Letitia's benefit?"

"You understand, Kitty, that it is only on Letitia's account that we—we,—of course Letitia has Bob's people to think of. In London one has to be so very particular whom

one knows. No doubt Mrs. Benetfink would like to know Letitia very much——”

“No doubt she would do nothing of the kind,” thrust in Kitty. “Letitia’s a fine lady, and Mrs. Benetfink is just a dear, old, rather common one; as nice as she can be, and not at all troubling her head about doing the ‘right thing,’ and going to the ‘right places,’ as you swells do.”

“Kitty, dear child, don’t say ‘you swells.’ ”

“Why not? You *are* swells, you and Ethel. I always think how gorgeous you look when you set forth all in your best, holding your heads in the air, for some grand party or other; and I am sure to hear afterwards how you’ve been admired and made a fuss about. But you will never turn *me* into a swagger Miss Masterdon. I’m only Kitty, and I like to enjoy myself;

and though Mrs. Benetfink does sometimes make me laugh a little down in my throat, it's not *her* I'm laughing at, it's only her way of looking at things. And as for letting her go to a house where she wasn't wanted"—the colour rose in Kitty's cheek—"you may be very sure I shall take care she doesn't do *that!*" she concluded, proudly.

"Say no more," whispered Maud to Ethel. She perceived the right chord had been touched.

Directly the train stopped at Waterloo Station, Kitty was on the alert to bid her sisters farewell, and be off by herself with her own footman, whom her quick eyes espied in a twinkling, and whom she had been instructed how to distinguish by a ribbon passed through his buttonhole. Mrs. Benetfink had herself tied the ribbon there, and impressed upon Andrew, a raw Scotch youth, good of heart but

sluggish of brain, to be as clever as he could in picking out her young lady visitor from among the train's passengers.

What Andrew's cleverness might have amounted to boots not here to inquire, for Kitty saved him the trouble of exerting it.

"There he is! That's my man!" she cried, with keen exultation; "and just where he should be—just where I was looking for him! And I dare say that's your creature, all painted and powdered, gaping up and down, and hardly taking the trouble to turn his head this way! Isn't that your creature? I knew it was! As like Letitia as he can be—I mean as like Letitia's footman—I mean—never mind, I'm off. Good-bye to you both. Bless you! bless you! I hope you'll enjoy yourselves one half as much as I mean to do. I say," turning back with a momentary hesitation, "you might just drop

me a line now and then to tell me what you are about."

"Of course we shall write to you, child!" said Maud, kindly. "What an absurd girl you are! You speak almost as if we should be ashamed of you, and you know it is not that at all."

"Oh, I know it is not that!" said Kitty, cheerfully, though her eyelids quivered a little. "I know all about it. But it just seemed rather odd to be saying 'Good-bye' and yet to be stopping in the same place."

But in a few minutes she had forgotten all about the oddness. Kitty had such a sweet, frank nature, and such perfect trustfulness in the good will of all about her, that it only needed an affectionate kiss from either sister, and the repeated assurance that she would be thought of and communicated with (at intervals), for her to cast off the little cloud which had for a moment overshadowed her

spirits, and for all to be sunshine once more.

As she drove off in Mrs. Benetfink's solid, comfortable carriage, which, to her glee, was empty, her hostess having been detained at the last moment, she indulged herself by making the promised "face" as she passed Lady Latimer's elegant victoria, and neither Maud nor Ethel could resist laughing in response.

It was only Kitty—and their hearts felt rather soft towards Kitty as she rolled away.

By the time Kitty arrived in Gordon Square her happiness, importance, and pleasurable anticipation were a treat to see. The friends, whose unexpected call had detained Mrs. Benetfink in her own drawing-room, fell in love with her young visitor on the spot. They had never beheld anything prettier than Kitty's bounding rush into the old lady's

arms. "And wasn't it kind of her to think of me?" she appealed to the other two, whose sympathising faces betokened appreciation and begot confidence. "And to have me all by myself! Just what I like best! To go about with *her*, you know, all day long! And no one else to interfere! No one else to be talked to! Just we two together! Won't it be delightful?"

The visitors gone, "Now let us talk," cried Kitty, settling down. "Let us plan it all out. It begins with to-morrow, doesn't it?"

"Well, I took tickets for to-night——"

For *to-night!*" screamed Kitty.

"For the Botanic Fête," nodded Mrs. Benetfink. "So now, shall we go up and see your room? My maid is putting out your things; and, Kitty," nervously, "I—I just took the liberty of getting in these——" for laid upon the bed in Kitty's room

were three lovely new made-up skirts; one with a neat little bodice, the other two with materials awaiting construction. "Being a relation and an old body, and your own particular friend, I thought your mamma would allow me," murmured Mrs. Benetfink, trying not to look guilty. "You see, it's so difficult to get things attended to for all; and your sisters—so I just took it on myself. And there's a nice little dressmaker at Marshall's," smiling across the bed, "who is coming in to-morrow morning, first thing after breakfast. Well now, I *am* glad you're pleased. I thought you would be," returning a rapturous embrace. "And here is Blossom to look after you and settle you in. Blossom says if you mind sleeping alone in this big room that Lizzie—that's the under-girl—can have a bed in the dressing-room here," opening a side door. "Oh, the bed's there already, I see! And

quite right too, Blossom. I am glad you went and did it without stopping to ask questions. So now I'll be off, and you take your time, and shake off all your dust. If you would like a warm bath, the bath-room's next door, and it might freshen you up for the evening? Blossom will get it ready, and you can pop in while she's unpacking. See to it, Blossom. And oh, Kitty! there's one thing more—these roses," turning to a bunch on the toilet-table. "Although you come from a land of roses, I dare say you won't despise them, and I like to see a young girl with a posy. Put them in your belt to-night, my dear; and you'll always have a flower to wear whenever you're going out. If I forget, just ask me for it. There now," looking round, "is that all?"

"I should think it must be all," said Kitty, looking straight at her with moist eyes, "because there

really isn't anything else left to wish for."

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It was one of the hottest days of the year, so that there was perhaps some excuse for people being languid and peevish, especially people who had been toiling after pleasure for many days and nights together, and who, if they had found it, were scarcely inclined to allow as much.

By their listless attitudes and disjointed conversation—if conversation it could be called—any one could have told that it was a family party which was gathered together, or, strictly speaking, which drooped in company within the shaded windows of a small house in Mayfair. One by one they had strayed in from the flowering balcony, vowing that it was hotter without than within; and now the three sisters, Letitia, Maud, and Ethel, fanned themselves with their pocket-handkerchiefs, or

hung their arms by their sides, as they endeavoured by absolute rest from every sort of exertion to prepare for the moment when effort must again be made.

Yet no one suggested the idea of abandoning the effort. Of course they would go to the Embassy Ball; and of course it would be like every other ball, crowded and gorgeous, and unsatisfactory; and they would come away fatigued to death, and fit only to drop on to their pillows, and remain there till to-morrow's sun should be high in the heavens, making fresh demands, which were yet the demands of all its predecessors.

"This London season is really very hard work," observed Letitia, at last, as sapiently as though the remark had never been made before. "I am sure I don't know how one ever lives through it. If one could pick and choose—but that's just what one can't do. People talk

about going out 'a little.' But who ever does go out 'a little'? You are either *in it*, or you are *out of it*—at least that's what I find."

"It is certainly better to be 'in it' than 'out of it.' " This was Ethel's wisdom.

"Of course one could enjoy it more if it could be taken by inches," subjoined Maud; "for instance, if one could turn weeks into months —"

"Oh, I don't know that I want months of this!" interposed Lady Latimer, hastily, missing the point. "I am always thankful when the season is over, and the order is given to pack up and be off. I really think"—but what she really thought was never destined to be known.

The door opened.

"Ha, I thought I'd find you all melting away in here," quoth Sir Robert, poking in a little brisk face. "Here's Syd saying the weather's

glorious," indicating a handsome sunburnt edition of himself. "Syd likes the heat," continued little Bob, dropping into a chair. "He says it makes him feel more fit than he has done since he came home from the East."

"I should not mind the heat if I could take things as easily as Captain Latimer does," said Maud Masterdon, throwing a half-reproachful glance at Sir Robert's brother. "If one could make up one's mind to go nowhere, live at a club—"

"That's what he does—lives at his club," dashed in her brother-in-law. "He is to be found standing about in that nice cool hall, morning, noon, and night. I'm hanged if he isn't in the right of it too. It's beastly being on the rush all the time; only—I say, doesn't it get a bit monotonous, Syd?"

"It does, rather," said Syd, cheerfully.

"Then why not come with us sometimes, Sydney?" Here was a chance for which Letitia had been longing. "You know how often we have asked you."

"I know you're awfully good," said he.

"But you won't come, all the same."

Then little Bob laughed aloud. "You won't catch him, not you. Do you suppose it hasn't been tried before? He never answers his invitations. I believe it's too much trouble even to tear them up; they are just left to accumulate."

"Oh, he's simply too fine for anything!" Letitia tossed her head a little, whilst her sisters maintained the silence of discreet young women who feel their charms unappreciated.

"I come to *your* parties, you know, Letitia——" began Captain Latimer.

"When?" shot like a cannon-ball from Letitia's lips.

"To be sure, I did not come, but I meant to, last week——"

"And you refused my dinner invitation for next."

"That's it! At him, Letitia!" Sir Robert rubbed his hands in glee. "He's too big a swell altogether. He always was too grand for me; and I believe he never would come near the house, if I didn't go myself and hook him right out of that old club door." As he spoke he made an affectionate grimace which betokened a perfect understanding between the brothers. "He only came now because he wants to know if I may go with him to-night," concluded the speaker.

"To-night? Go with him to-night?" Letitia sat bolt upright in an instant. Her husband go with his brother, instead of his brother going with them all! And she would have been so particularly pleased to take Captain Sydney Lati-

mer to the Embassy Ball, for which he had his own invitation, and where, if he did not know more people than she herself did, he would be welcomed by some of high importance, and would be intimate with several to whom an introduction might be useful. She was now really vexed as well as alarmed.

"Bob told me he was going with you to a ball," said Captain Latimer, patting on the head a little dog which had run up to him. "Balls aren't much sport, at least to a man who doesn't dance. I am going to a play—no, I believe it ought not to be called a play; it's an 'Entertainment,' that's the dodge; but all the same, I hear it is awfully funny, and I want to see Corney Grain in it. I hear he is awfully good in his new piece——"

"Corney Grain!" exclaimed three pairs of lips at once. "Why, that is at the German Reeds!" appended

Lady Latimer, almost in a whisper. Then she turned upon her husband such a face of blank consternation as made him leap into the air and wring his hands in ecstasy.

“It is the German Reeds, by Jove!” he cried. “The murder’s out, by Jove! I thought it would nearly kill ‘em!” to his brother. Then to his wife: “He won’t go near your Embassy Ball. He won’t go to any of the first parties in London. He can hardly be got even for a dinner, and even by his best friends,—and here he has set his heart on going to laugh at the most squalid show in the whole place, and wants me to go with him; and, by Jove! I am going too!”

The ladies sat absolutely mute.

“I’ll do my level best to bring him on to the ball afterwards,” proceeded little Bob, anxiously.

“We ought to be much honoured,” replied his wife, dropping her eyelids.

But the shot told. She made no further opposition; and Sir Robert, saying he would not be ten minutes dressing, flew upstairs three steps at a time; while Captain Latimer explained that it had been arranged that the two were to dine together at his much-reviled club, in order that the early hour at which the "squalid show" commenced might not inconvenience the Mayfair household.

As it was, the two arrived late at the entertainment for which they were bound; and the piece was in full swing as they took their seats in the somewhat dingy hall, full in every part, and proportionately warm. The audience was not a smart one, and Kitty Masterdon had her eye in a moment on the two figures who seated themselves in the vacant places on the other side of the aisle, within a few feet of where she and Mrs. Benetfink were enjoying them-

selves to their hearts' content. "Two swells," said Kitty to herself, —then the next moment: "Oh, I say, one is Bob!" She could not have been more surprised if Bob had walked into the drawing-room in Gordon Square.

"That is Bob," she repeated, watching the two with interested eyes, "and that other thing's his brother that Letitia thinks so much of. Well, now, this is a joke! They will never see me—the brother would never know me if he did—and I shall tell Maud and Ethel afterwards that my places cannot be so vulgar after all, when this grand Captain Latimer thinks them worth coming to;" and she chuckled with renewed delight. "He looks quite festive," she proceeded, presently, "and there is Bob laughing like anything! Whenever there is anything very good, we shall all laugh together, and nobody be any the

wiser!" She then gave herself up to the play.

"There's a little girl over there enjoying herself hugely," thought Captain Latimer, and he could not resist looking round once or twice when an infectious trill of merriment from the other side of the aisle broke upon his ear. Kitty had a charming laugh.

Kitty had on her new rose-coloured dress, which matched exactly the bright tint in her cheeks, and enhanced the blue of her limpid eyes and the gold of her overflowing hair. She looked what she was—a lovely, happy young girl, without a care in the world, without a thought which could not be laid bare to every eye.

So radiant, so animated, so full of sparkling life and vivacity did she seem, that it was hardly to be wondered at if even amongst a crowd of other youthful faces hers

seemed to stand out pre-eminently, especially when viewed in conjunction with the benevolent glances of a silvery-haired old lady who obviously regarded her charge with more than favour. At length it came to this, that there was quite a little ring formed as it were involuntarily, of which Kitty was the centre, who all looked to her, and laughed and applauded whenever anything specially droll on the stage made them sure of the joyous response it would call forth.

“By Jove! she has the jolliest little laugh I ever heard!” And Captain Latimer began quite to listen for the laugh.

But he did not tell Bob about it; and Bob, who was entirely occupied with what was going forward, drinking it all in as though the wit were the most wonderful and the comedy the most absorbing to which he had ever hearkened, missed the by-play.

"Bob's all right," Kitty told herself. "Good little Bob; he will never see me across that big brother of his. Sydney must be nearly a foot taller, and he's ever so much better-looking. What fun it is! We must get away as quick as we can when it is over, though, or I should never hear the last of it from the girls." (Kitty was wont to designate her august sisters as "the girls" in internal colloquy, her reverence for them and their opinions being only skin-deep.)

She rather surprised Mrs. Benet-fink now by the precipitation with which she sprang to her feet almost before the curtain fell, and the urgency with which she caught up her own wrap, and whirled the old lady's round her shoulders.

"There's no hurry, my dear;" but Kitty could not be made to understand that there was no hurry. She was halfway down the aisle before

her good-humoured chaperon was well out of her chair, and in her heart was saying: "She can catch me up outside; I sha'n't go beyond the hall. I can sneak behind the people there, and watch my two swells go by; then I can pounce on Mrs. Benetfink, and we'll toddle merrily home together."

But there was destined to be a hitch in the programme. Within the next few minutes there was a disturbance in the outer hall which somewhat blocked the exit of those within.

"What a jolly long time it takes to empty this place!" exclaimed Captain Latimer to his brother, as the two leisurely strolled down, staring about them, and passing here and there a comment. "Rum place, isn't it? Looks a bit dusty. One would think it paid well enough to be kept in better repair. And they might open a few more doors,

and not keep us all night getting out."

"They are saying somebody's met with an accident outside," replied his brother. "Some woman has fallen down, and hurt herself. Hallo! Who's here?" as the figure of a young girl, by this time quite familiar to Captain Latimer, pressed its way back through the out-streaming current, and to the latter's amazement the voice which he had heard rippling so merrily throughout the evening, now in piteous accents accosted his brother, and that by the familiar appellation of "Bob."

"Why, Kitty!" exclaimed Bob. "Why—what on earth?—I did not know you were in town! It is my sister-in-law," in explanation aside.

"Kitty, this is my brother Sydney—"

"Oh, yes!" Kitty disposed of the introduction with a nod, having no time to think about it. "Oh, Bob, do come!" seizing him by the hand.

"Come quickly and help me; I don't know what to do. Mrs. Benetfink has fallen and hurt her ankle—she was hurrying after me—there was such a crowd, she didn't see the step, and now I can't find the footman, and—and I don't know what to do——" almost crying.

"All right—all right," said Bob, soothingly; "you tell Mrs. Benetfink who I am, and I will take care of her; and Syd will find the footman. Is that the old lady?" in a lower tone, as they came up with a little sympathising group of which the hapless Mrs. Benetfink was the object. "Sorry to hear you have had a fall, ma'am. Pray let me see you to your carriage." In a moment Sir Robert Latimer stared away all intruders and took possession of the situation; and presently—but we really have no time to tell how it all happened—Kitty found herself seated opposite the poor old

lady, her momentary trouble over, but with, alas! a black outlook for the future. Her kind friend was in great pain, and there was no doubt that the fall had been a serious one. A doctor must instantly be summoned.

"You must let me see you home," said Sir Robert, seating himself by Kitty's side. "And Syd will go for the doctor if you will tell him where."

"No, indeed, there's Andrew," gasped Andrew's mistress, struggling with herself. "Andrew knows—where—to go;" her eyes closing, as she could with difficulty articulate the last words.

"Go at once then," supplemented Sir Robert, turning to the said Andrew. "You know the doctor's house. Bring him back with you then; bring somebody, anyway. Don't you be alarmed, Kitty," turning to her; "I'm here to stand by

you, and I will see you through. I say, what is Syd doing?" turning round to look.

Captain Latimer was mounting the box seat, the footman having already hailed a hansom, in which he was driving off.

"Well, that's cool," murmured Bob. Then in a lower aside: "But, I suppose, she won't mind," nodding opposite. "We will just come to the house, and help you to get her out. It is all right, Kitty," he added, after a pause, for he saw that Kitty could hardly speak.

Although Mrs. Benetfink remained to all appearance almost insensible to the night's proceedings, she was wont to recur to them afterwards in a manner that showed she was by no means so oblivious as was supposed.

"I could not speak," she would aver, "and I was very bad, but I was not *so* bad as to be quite knocked

stupid. I knew well enough that I had two fine young men to look after me, and to help me up my own steps, and even to my own room—with Joseph's assisting, of course; and as for that husband of Letitia's I declare I could have kissed his honest face, he looked so much concerned, and as if he could have cried too whenever I cried out. And there he sat with me, hand in hand, till the doctor came, insisting upon it that Kitty was too young, and that she had much better be out of the room till I was more myself. And I do think a dearer man there never lived. And what Kitty would do now without him, I don't know."

The latter remark had reference to the black outlook which, it has been hinted, loomed before the hapless Kitty's vision directly her immediate anxieties were over, and the nature of the accident ascertained.

"Yes, I am afraid it's all up with

you, Kitty." Sir Robert shook his head after hearing the doctor's verdict. "No more larks going in this house. Now, I tell you what you will do. You will come straight off to us to-morrow. Letitia shall fetch you——"

Kitty's eyes opened, and her lips parted.

"That will make it all right, won't it?" said Bob, kindly. And he proceeded to dilate.

"Stop," said Kitty, suddenly. "Don't ask me; don't say another word; it's awfully kind of you, and you know how I should like it—but it would look—oh, you know what it would look like! She's the dearest and the kindest—and to have me go and leave her the moment she can't take me about to things, as if I cared for nothing else——" she broke off with a little sob. "Don't you think anything more about me, Bob. I shall be quite happy here. I am

going to show Mrs. Benetfink that I love her *for herself*—and——”

“And I tell you what it is,” said Bob, suddenly stepping forward, and seizing her hand in both of his. “You’re a thundering good little girl—that’s what you are; and I sha’n’t say another word to tempt you away. You’re quite right not to desert the old lady. Upon my word, I am proud of you. And I tell you what, Kitty; I will come every single day, and take you to every single place that Mrs. Benetfink had promised you”—(for confidences had passed by this time); “she won’t mind my doing that, will she?”

“Oh, no!” Kitty was joyfully sure that, so far from minding, nothing would please Mrs. Benetfink better.

“Well, then, I’ll come,” said Bob; “and I can come in and see her and tell her the news, and Letitia shall

call. Why she hasn't called already I'm sure I don't know. I don't understand these things. But now, where shall we go to-morrow?"

"We *were* going," said Kitty, glancing at him, "to the Crystal Palace."

"The Crystal Palace!" cried Sir Robert, "the very thing! I haven't been to the Crystal Palace since I was in petticoats. What time were you going?"

"We *had* been going," said Kitty, with the same dubious emphasis, "about three o'clock. We were to drive down and have tea, and then go to things; and have dinner, and go to things again; and drive back after the fireworks. To-morrow is a firework night, and poor Mrs. Benetfink and I did want so dreadfully to go!"

"I am sorry for Mrs. Benetfink," said Bob, pleasantly; "but anyhow, you and I will go and enjoy our-

selves. May I borrow your phaeton, Syd?"

"I want it for myself," said Syd, "if this young lady will give me the pleasure of driving her."

And now began the most wonderful period of Kitty's life. She had been so happy before, so content with all the simple pleasures provided for her, so grateful for all the loving kindness lavished upon her, that it might have seemed as though there were hardly any room left in her heart for further emotions of a like nature. But somehow it *was* a different thing to dash off from her own door in an elegant park phaeton, behind a pair of high-stepping horses, who never seemed to need more than an infinitesimal share of their master's attention, from rolling solemnly away within a large landau with only an old lady, however cheerful and amiable, as her companion on the jaunt. It *was* a new

and exhilarating experience to be escorted hither and thither by two smart men, who were yet not "smart" in any way that would have lessened them in her estimation, or detracted from her comfort.

Letitia thought that as it was "only Kitty," she need not put herself out to combat Sir Robert's whim of making up to his young sister-in-law for the loss she had sustained. If Kitty liked to go with Bob, and Bob chose to take her, and Sydney Latimer chose to be of the party, there was really no harm in it. Kitty did not require to be chaperoned as yet, and though, as it was "only Kitty," it hardly mattered that she had been unearthed in her present "impossible" quarters, whose very impossibility roused Captain Latimer's compassion, still the very fact of its being "only Kitty" made it too certain that the feeling was compassion—nothing more.

This was Letitia's view of the case.

But Letitia did not know everything. She did not know, for instance, that the leafy garden within the quaint old square was a pleasant place to sit in on a summer afternoon, and that a cheery little party often camped out there for hours together, of whom one would be an old lady in an invalid chair, one a fair girl in the first flush of youth, and another a tawny-visaged soldier, whose mission it seemed to be to entertain and interest them both. Sometimes the whole afternoon would pass away thus.

On other occasions the trio would await the arrival of a fourth, preparatory to one of the excursions promised by Sir Robert, which he now showed an unexpected and most ingenious fertility in devising. Late though Bob would always be, no one would ever express the slightest

impatience at his unpunctuality. Captain Latimer's phaeton would crawl round and round the square, or draw up beneath the rustling shade of overhanging boughs, until horses and men alike grew drowsy 'twixt heat and inactivity,—but Syd himself was having a good time on the other side of the railings.

He always came first, and came by himself; he had invariably some good reason to give for doing so. His brother had so many engagements, whereas he had none. Bob was "rushed" from morning to night in the season; for his part, he liked to take things easy. It was so jolly sitting still, and it would be cooler driving by-and-by when the sun had begun to go down a little. As for his horses, they were better standing out under the trees than in their own stuffy stable. He hoped Mrs. Benetfink did not think him a nuisance for coming before the time,

but it was really so—so jolly sitting there. Evidently there was no other excuse to offer.

Of all this, Letitia, as we say, knew nothing. Neither did any of them know that when chirpy little Sir Robert perched himself on the back seat of the phaeton and smoked cigar upon cigar as he was trotted down to Kew, or Richmond, or Kingston Hill—anywhere and everywhere that Kitty had a mind to go—he was saying to himself that playing gooseberry was by no means such bad fun as people made out. Kitty was “only a child,” was she? All right. Sydney was “never thinking of her,” was he not? All right. It was satisfactory to have those beliefs prevail in his own home; they kept everything smooth there, while permitting him a free hand.

And he meant to have a free hand whether permitted or not. “Syd is

a queer fellow," he nodded to himself, "and you have got to go his way, not expect him to go yours. Letitia wanted him for one of her sisters," with a grin; "but, by Jove! she will nearly have a fit when, after going through half the women she knows, she learns that it is only Kitty!"

Accordingly little Bob kept his secret close, and permitted not the faintest suspicion of it to leak out. Indeed, at this juncture he exhibited a cleverness unknown before; and Letitia, as well as her sisters, grew to think that there was something almost babyish in Kitty's silly demands upon her too good-natured brother-in-law.

"I really should not give in to her as you do," Lady Latimer would exclaim now and again; "you quite spoil that child."

Maud and Ethel had proposed Kitty's returning home, but Bob

stoutly combated the idea; and certainly when Kitty came to South Street there was no shadow upon her bright face, and nothing to indicate that all was not going well with her in spite of the misadventure of her hostess.

Every one in South Street was too busy to see much of Kitty—which was perhaps as well, all things considered—but Bob gravely assured them he was doing the best he could for her, and happily no one ever inquired minutely into what that “best” was. “They think that Syd still stands all day long in the hall of that old club,” chuckled Sir Robert to himself, “and I don’t see that it’s my business to peach. Of course I could not take a full-blown young lady about like this; but Letitia says herself it is ‘only Kitty,’ and I suppose I am about equal to managing Kitty’s affairs. They shall not be botched by interference anyway.”

Never in his life had he enjoyed himself so much. He and Sydney took Kitty up the river, and gave her tea in the gardens of the old-fashioned inn beneath the Clieveden Woods, Sir Robert going off for a stroll by himself before the party took to the water again. He escorted her over Hampton Court, and was not at all surprised to find that she and Syd missed him from among the sightseers in the great tapestry hall, and went to look for him down by the water-lily pond. He piloted his inquisitive young sister-in-law down to Gravesend to lunch on board an ocean "liner," and thought the expedition quite one to suit Syd; indeed, considered it the most natural thing imaginable that his brother should find the vessel and its equipment so interesting, and such a novelty (although Captain Latimer had sailed to every quarter of the globe), that he must needs fol-

low Kitty up and down and round and round, from the captain's cabin to the engineer's gangway. "I am about running dry now," he told himself, however, at the close of this last excursion. "By Jove! I can't think of much more," shaking his head wisely.

He took his brother into confidence as they trotted home from Gordon Square in a hansom.

"I think I have done pretty well for you, Syd. Don't you think that now—hum—ah——?"

"Yes, I do think that now—hum—ah—"; retorted Syd, frankly. "To-morrow is Sunday, you know. You need not come along this way on Sunday," pointing backwards with his thumb, "but I will look you up in the evening. Shall you be in about—say eight o'clock?"

About eight o'clock Sir Robert was pacing his front drawing-room restlessly to and fro, and absolutely

refusing to go in to dinner, alleging that Sunday evening dinner could surely wait five minutes when a man was expecting his brother, and when no one was particularly hungry for it.

"You are generally hungry enough," said Letitia.

"Well, I am not to-night," said Bob.

The next moment he had his head out of the window, and, with a cry that was almost a whoop of exultation, dashed down the staircase before the door-bell rang.

"There is Syd, and—and—a lady with him!" he flung back as he disappeared through the doorway.

"A lady? Who can it be?" Letitia looked round at the other two. "Bob seems quite excited. What a noise he is making in the hall! Is he going to bring them up? Or shall we go down, and take them into the dining-room? What can be the meaning of all that noise?" as

voices and laughter in joyous confusion grew more and more distinctly audible above stairs, the door having been left ajar by Sir Robert in his flight.

"They are coming up, I think," said Maud, listening; and she and Ethel glanced at each other. They thought they were prepared for what was to follow, and guessed what would be expected of them when Captain Sydney Latimer should be ushered in, and present the lady whose arrival had caused such a commotion. They were ready with the best smiles they could muster, when a swift patter of steps was heard upon the staircase, and were almost disappointed when the light form which darted in, all smiles, tears, and incoherence—all embraces, excuses, and extravagances—proved to be that of—only Kitty!

Had Kitty gone crazed? What was there to kiss, and hug, and cry

about? What had happened? What was—what could be—the meaning of it all?

If it had been any one else! But—— “But, by Jove! I thought it would make you sit up!” cried little Bob, almost beside himself with excitement. “I knew how you’d feel! It is ‘only Kitty,’ is it? Ask this fellow here,” pushing Captain Latimer forward, “what he has to say to that. *He* doesn’t say ‘only Kitty,’ I can tell you. He—oh, I say, Letitia,” all in a moment the speaker’s face changed, his eyelids fell, a contrite seriousness overspread his whole countenance, “I am so sorry I kept dinner waiting for only Kitty,” he sighed, penitently.

A TERRIBLE MOMENT

A Terrible Moment



"Great floods have flown from simple sources."

—*All's Well that Ends Well.*



Lina sat frowning over her house-books. Who does not frown over house-books? Who does not know the look of the hateful little pile, always neatly adjusted, with the red-glazed, gilt-lettered one—the *bête noire* of the whole collection—the butcher's book, lying blatantly on the top? Why is it always in the front, leading, as it were, its minions in the rear? Let house-keepers say.

Poor little Caroline Lambert was not much of a housekeeper; indeed, nature never designed her for a

housekeeper at all. But when her mother died, and Lina had been taken into confidence about the family affairs—that is, had been openly confided in, for from earliest childhood she had silently understood many things which had sobered gay *insouciance*—she had taken a great resolve: she was going to fight the world as her poor, brave, gentle parent had done, and be the real, though unacknowledged head of her father's house.

The world with her—the world which had to be fought and conquered—resolved itself mainly into the detestable above-mentioned house-books; they lay at the root of the thoughtful brow, the too-serious eye, and the somewhat sad expression of a little mouth which seemed as though it had been formed only to smile or pout.

Lina was a very pretty girl, and knew it—knew also that it was not

only the bereavement she had sustained which debarred her from the triumphs and enjoyments of fair girlhood. She had learnt even before the days of mourning that many an invitation had to be refused, and many a brilliant scene foregone which would have cost money; and that although she lived in a fairly good house, and what would have been called comfortable circumstances, there was always an underlying current running dead against her and hers, which had to be stemmed as she and they might.

For prudence' sake appearances had to be maintained; Mr. Lambert argued that nothing would have a more fatal effect on his professional career, nothing make clients more shy of putting their affairs into his hands than the fact of his having to move into a cheaper residence in a humbler part of London. He must preserve a decent exterior; he must

affect to be doing well; now and again he must entertain. It was a cruel necessity, but the tide would turn some day; and if they could but manage to keep their heads above water for the present, a time would come when they should swim easily upon the surface.

“But, oh! it is so long in coming,” sighed his young daughter to herself on the grim November afternoon, when she sat down to her weekly task with the house-books on her lap.

She had just finished, and finished with a sigh, and was sitting looking before her with the dull dejection of spirit the occupation seldom failed to produce, when the door burst open, and swift as thought the little heap was thrown into a work-basket by her side, and concealed beneath an embroidered coverlet. She would not vex her father by the sight.

It was not, however, Mr. Lambert who had returned before his time; it

was two little rosy, chubby, merry creatures who precipitated themselves on to their sister's vacant lap without dreaming that it had been previously occupied by intruders less welcome than themselves.

"Are you alone? We thought you would be alone," cried little Gladys, bustling up; "and nurse said we might come if there was nobody here."

"Nurse only said we were to come if you *wanted* us," corrected the elder, (she was only seven, while Gladys was but four); "but we thought you would be sure to want us, if there were no nasty people here." And she mounted on Lina's other knee with the confidence of proprietorship. The elder sister put an arm round each.

"And we do so want to tell you what we have been talking about," the little one struck in again; "it was about shoes. Nurse says we

really *must* have shoes;" sitting upright in order to be still more impressive and important. "She says we really *must*; because, you see, the Christmas parties will be coming on, and our old shoes will hardly hold together," unbuttoning with eager satisfaction a little squat strap-shoe, and looking at it fondly, as though its state of dilapidation were creditable and endearing.

"Mine are as bad, and they have been patched over and over again," said Florence, taking her sister's face between her hands to make sure of attention and sympathy. "Nurse says the shoemaker won't undertake to do them any more. He says it's no use wasting more work upon them, for they're not worth it. That's what he says; and nurse says she can't mend them herself, for there's just one thing she can't manage, and that is boots and shoes. She can make everything else."

"And she is going to make us the most beautiful frocks out of mother's old white petticoat." Gladys caressed her shoe, her blue eyes beaming.

"Oh, hush!" Florence looked shocked, and glanced apprehensively at her sister. "Nurse wouldn't like you to speak like that, Gladdie," remonstrated she, shaking her severe head. "It's only that Gladdie's so little, you know," she added, feeling all the weight of her maturer years. "*I* knew whose petticoat it was, because it came out of the big wardrobe drawer, and *I* never said anything." Then she turned her face round again: "But Gladdie *would* know what it was, and what nurse was going to do with it."

"And they will be beautiful frocks—oh! beautiful." The little one stroked her sister's hair and peered into her eyes, holding up the eyelids

with her tiny fingers to make sure that all was right. "Nurse is to get some more of the holey work."

"Only a *very* little more," said Florence, anxiously. "Only just enough to go round the neck and sleeves."

"And white ribbons to tie up the arms," struck in Gladys, with rapture.

"You won't mind, will you, dear?" whispered a soft little voice on her sister's shoulder; while Florence laid down her head contentedly, and shook back her fleece of shining hair.

All the time Lina never said a word; she could not find it in her heart to check the innocent outpourings, and she knew that the faithful creature who provided for her darlings' wants and necessities would not spend a penny which could be saved; but white "party" frocks, and new morocco shoes,

pointed to Christmas dissipations, in which she foresaw the one black word, "expense"; and although her little Florrie and Gladdie should not be grudged any pleasures she could give them, she looked somewhat ruefully at the little, patched shoe, which the latter still dangled by the button with a triumphant air, and thought—for she was but a girl herself—that she needed to be fitted out as much as the little ones, and had no chance of supplying her wants as she could theirs.

Presently she drew them on to talk of other things, though this was not easy, for their imaginations had been dazzled, and the thought of the cutting and shaping going on overhead drew their thoughts like a magnet from any other topic presented to them. Lina knew by the absent-mindedness which made Florence unable to think of any appropriate adjective wherewith to "Love

her Love" in the time-honoured nursery game, and little Gladys out of countenance to find it was her turn so soon again, that the thoughts of both were roving; and although she tried various other distractions equally in favour with the little couple, she was half-amused, half-vexed, to be asked over and over again what o'clock it was, and finally to have it suggested that nurse would be glad to have them go upstairs earlier than usual in order to set her free for the all-important business of the frocks.

"She has got so much to do;" Gladys jumped off her sister's knee at last. "If she can, she is going to contrive us some little white slips too—that is, if you will let her have the things. She is going to——"

"But she wants to talk to Lina about that herself,"—Florence conscientiously averted every premature disclosure,—"so we won't tease poor

Lina to-night," hugging and kissing fondly; and with "Good-night, darling, good-night," from each rosebud mouth, the two sprang away into the darkness of the large, gloomy room, and, scarce waiting to close the door in their excitement, tore upstairs with echoing childish mirth, which lasted until their own upper regions were regained, and the intervention of the nursery door made further sounds inaudible. Lina looked after them with a smileless face.

That afternoon in Regent Street she had seen a ball-dress which another girl was buying. The other girl was not sure whether she wanted it or not. When the shopwoman's back was turned, she consulted with her chaperon, (obviously a guardian, or relation, whose mission it was to advise, but certainly not to control), enumerating the dresses she already possessed—the

white satin and tulle, the cream satin and spotted net, the flowered silk—and next inquired, would she have any real use for more in the immediate future; and, if not, would it not be a pity to be encumbered with a stale robe, after a newer fashion had set in? Poor Lina had listened involuntarily to it all.

She would not have minded about a newer fashion, nor called a three-months-old costume out of date. A trifling commission had been made her excuse for strolling round the gay department, and she had watched the scene wistfully from behind a voluminously draped lay figure. A vague, foolish curiosity to know how it would end detained her there. Not that she doubted for a moment, not even from the outset. She told herself with a faint, irrepressible bitterness, that there did not exist a girl—a girl young and pretty like herself—who would

voluntarily refrain from the acquisition of that shining, shimmering vision of loveliness, when it came to the point.

“And really, I think you are right.” The portly dowager nodded approbation when the purchase was made. “You will never see anything to suit your taste better; and with so many gay visits before you, you are sure to find it come in handy sometime.”

Gay visits! Again Caroline Lambert breathed a soft, hopeless note of longing. She had no visits, gay or otherwise, before her; her acquaintance was not large, and was mainly composed of people who, although they might have agreeable engagements for themselves during the forthcoming festal season, were not in a position to be entertainers. She might be invited to a few dull dinners with her father, or perhaps to accompany her little sisters to

a children's party; but Lina was nineteen, and craved for something which was not precisely met by either prospect. The vision called up by the elder lady's prudent exultation was inexpressibly tantalising. Caroline knew what *her* Christmas would bring. Not many bills, perhaps; for she had steadily kept these down, refusing to make a purchase which could not be paid for then and there, and by this resolution denying herself more than any one ever knew, for the household money had to be given account of to no one; but if Christmas-time brought not the duns of tradespeople, it would resolve itself, nevertheless, into a tame, commonplace affair in Mr. Lambert's household; and his young daughter knew that the holiday period, wont to lavish so much on others of her age, such thrilling possibilities, such unmeasured, unexplored delights, meant to

her only a flickering ray of mild domestic sunshine, all very well in its way, but lacking something, I need hardly tell my youthful readers what.

One may be an affectionate daughter and sister, but it does not fill up the measure of one's content to have a whole merry-making season go by in making happy the hearts of two little cherubs already happy enough, or interchanging pleasantries with an easy, kindly, elderly parent, with whom, but for the tie of blood, one has nothing in common. Mr. Lambert often provoked his daughter—not consciously, for he would not have hurt the feelings of a fly—but their two natures were intrinsically and diametrically opposed; and whilst the seriousness of her demeanour and over-anxieties about what he called trifles would occasionally be felt by him as a damper to cheerfulness and a hin-

drance to hopeful effort, she did scant justice to the elasticity of his amiable, if somewhat volatile, disposition. Each meant well, and both had a part to play in family life.

Caroline's part was the hardest, or she thought so.

"Lina? Sitting alone? Where are the children?" Mr. Lambert's voice, a blithe, lively voice, sounded in the doorway. "I expected to have found the children here," continued he, producing a brown paper parcel. "I have brought them each a toy."

"Oh, papa!"

"Only a penny toy, my dear. Of one of the men in the streets. But I know it will please the little folks; I was quite taken with it myself; most amusing and ingenious. Let me show you how it goes along the carpet"—suiting the action to the words. "There now! Ha, ha, ha! Is it not comical? Can't imagine

how these things are made for the money. Shall we have the children down again, eh? I dare say they are not undressed yet."

"Better keep the toys for their Christmas presents." Caroline eyed with reproachful disdain two little painted men with carts racing over the floor. "I did not mean for their *only* presents," she made haste to add, for her own heart responded to the quick glance of her father's eye. "But we *can* only give them such very little things——"

"Surely I am not reduced to giving my own children penny toys for their Christmas presents," said he, pained by her tone. "I know how good and economical you are, my dear child; but there is such a thing as going too far."

And Lina felt there was. She had been absurd, exaggerating her own envious longings, her own sense of mortification and deprivation, to a

pitch that made the sight of her father, engrossed and amused, forgetful alike of home cares and business worries, rouse indignation, and cause her to overstep the bounds of common-sense, and mistake poverty for destitution.

The shade which passed across her father's brow restored her to herself.

"Papa, I am silly. Don't listen to me. I always have a bad hour or two after going through those wretched accounts."

"They are not worse than usual, are they, my dear?"

"Not at all worse, rather better; only——" She paused, and then the truth burst out. "Only, papa, we never get any *good* of it all; we pay and pay, and it takes every farthing we possess just to *live*—to keep a roof over our heads, and have food on the table, and clothes to wear. And they are only common, neces-

sary clothes—only clothes we cannot possibly do without. I hardly dare look in at a shop window——”

Mr. Lambert looked scared; he was easily scared.

“Is it as bad as that, my poor child? You have not proper clothes?”

“Oh, I did not say *proper* clothes; I have a hat, and a jacket, and a frock. I have even two frocks, wonderful to relate, and a shabby old dinner-dress.”

“In which you always look remarkably pretty. For all their finery, I never see that other girls cut you out.”

Alas! Something of the same thought had been playing the mischief in poor little Lina's bosom all the afternoon. She knew she could have shone, held her head with as high an air, danced with as light a step, and prattled with as musical a voice, as any one in the gay assemblages of which as yet she had only

beheld reflections—reflections which did but invest her with desire for the unattainable: how unattainable she alone seemed to realise.

“Papa, I try”—a little struggle with herself—“I try not to be discontented; but it is so hard to have to put *everything* aside—even the chances that do come now and then—because we cannot afford to go about like other people——”

“Of course, my dear, it is a deprivation; I feel it so myself.”

“But not as I do,” cried she, breathing quickly. “You have seen, and known, and lived; but I—the world is beyond me—I long to feel it, and touch it, and I can’t. Whichever way I turn we are so hemmed in by poverty.”

“Just so. ‘Hemmed in,’ ” assented he, with approbation.

“Poverty that no one sees or recognises; that you yourself hardly seem to feel.” Again an irrepress-

ible bitterness crept into the speaker's tone. "You go, and come, and meet with people——"

"Aye, to be sure, I meet with people." Mr. Lambert smiled complacently. "That reminds me, I met that nice fellow, Wycliffe, again to-day, and he was so friendly and pleasant I asked him to call. I told him he must come to dinner."

"Papa! To dinner?"

"He accepted at once. Said he didn't know many people in Town at this time of year; only chanced to be up on business."

"And you asked him to dinner? And you *know* we can't have dinner-parties——"

"Pho! pho! Who talked of dinner-parties?"

Then the torrent burst forth.

"You tell me to keep the house-keeping down, and every week it is all I can *do* to pay the books. I never have *a farthing* over; and

here is a man to whom we owe nothing, whom I have never even seen——”

“You will see him; he is to call first.”

“Why should he call? Why should he come near us?” cried she, excitedly. “We are not the sort of people he imagines. He hears of a good house, and you invite him in an offhand manner, and he expects a gay family, a smart household, and a fine, well-set-out dinner; and—and—when he comes, there—there—is only *me!*” Her shrill young voice quavered and broke at the word. Ere he could reply she had pushed past, and vanished through the open door.

“This housekeeping mania really gets upon her nerves,” said Mr. Lambert, raising his eyebrows, and shaking his head sagaciously. Nothing ever got upon his nerves.

When we are at a low ebb it is sel-

dom that anything happens to cheer us; oftener far, some small worry takes the opportunity for making its presence known, or some blow from an unexpected quarter, falls. Caroline's "worry" had its innings first, starting with the break of day. A servant was ill, and the others considerately waited to inform their young mistress of the fact till their master had left the house, by which means the burden, with all its concomitants, was (as burdens usually were in that house) thrown on her shoulders. It had to be carried—she carried it. By afternoon the doctor had pronounced the case one for a hospital; and in place of the respectable cook, hitherto one of her young mistress' few comforts, their reigned below stairs a charwoman, upon whom, but for the pressure of necessity, she would have looked askance.

She was just considering what

was to be done next, when, with a loud peal of the front-door bell, the "blow" took possession of the field. This consisted of a letter from her godmother, and a parcel; the former explaining that the latter—Lina's Christmas present—had been sent thus early, owing to the donor's departure for wintering in a warmer clime.

Now on this very impending departure my hapless heroine had been innocently building. Once before it had happened that when starting betimes for the Riviera, her relation had found no opportunity for selecting her annual gift, and had substituted a cheque; and "If only she would do so again," had been the subject of many anxious musings.

But alas! here was a handsome, useless, expensive toy, which Lady Beaumont thought "so clever," and would help "to amuse the children on winter evenings."

Poor, poor Lina! She almost dashed the fiddling Neapolitan with his basket of mock fruits to the floor. She spurned him with her foot as he lay grinning there. Five pounds!—five precious golden sovereigns, that would have been—what would they not have been to her?—to be thus cruelly, wantonly, mercilessly flung away!

And presently, in the dusk—for the light was waning and the lamps were lit outside—hot, blinding tears welled unheeded from her eyes, and streamed over the hand on which her burning cheek was pressed. She must be miserable; who could say she ought not to be miserable? Who could rebuke her for giving way at last beneath such an accumulation of calamities shared by none?

And anon arose from out the last bitter reflection a still more bitter resolution. Why should her griefs be shared by none? Why should not

her father for once be forced into sympathy, and have his eyes opened to the hardships of his lot and hers? He ought to feel, as she never could make him feel, that it was one deserving of resentment and rebellion. She would tell him so now; tell him the truth in plainest terms before he could stop her; before any qualms of filial duty could bind her tongue.

Hark! there was the door-bell! To her excited imagination its harsh, discordant clang sounded like a war-note to battle! It was the time of Mr. Lambert's usual return, and the next thing would be his brisk, alert entrance and cheerful greeting.

Cheerfulness at the moment was an actual crime to one whose heart was as heavy as Lina Lambert's; and scarce had the door opened and the expected step sounded on the floor, than, without raising her head or changing the crouching attitude

into which she had sunk, the piteous outcry made itself heard, which was to arouse at least some spark of fellow-feeling, if it could do nothing else, within her parent's breast.

"Papa, you wonder to find me crying? I dare say you think I have nothing to cry for? You often tell me how well I am off compared with others, and you never will see that there are things besides food, and clothes, and a roof over one's head; and that it is hard, it is hard, to see so much that is just beyond one's reach at every turn. You say we are not so very poor, but I say we *are* poor, and it seems as if ours were almost the worst kind of poverty—oh, don't speak!" catching an indistinct sound which she took to be a protest. "Don't speak; for I can't bear it. I know what you would say perfectly well. You would tell me it is very wrong to be so 'ungrateful to Providence,' and so 'discontented with my

home.' You think it is all for myself that I care. But it is not. I know it is not. It is for dear little Florrie and Gladdie, too, whom I have to refuse continually when they ask for things I know they ought to have. And they are such dear children, and I do love them so; I can't bear it."

Again an interruption was attempted, but again Caroline held up a passionate, imperative hand.

"Oh, do be quiet, and don't say I am 'undutiful' and 'disrespectful.' I don't mean to be; but to-day I feel as if I must speak out. Everything has gone wrong to-day. I thought we were at our lowest pass before, but now here is the cook ill and gone off to a hospital. And that," suddenly swerving round towards the toy, with its box and wrappings, which lay by her side, "*that* is Lady Beaumont's Christmas present! Yes, indeed it is! And you know what I

had thought, what I hoped it might be. Papa, I feel that if you have asked that man—that Mr. Wycliffe—to dinner, it would be the last drop in the cup! Papa, I cannot have him; I *will* not!—”

“Ahem.”

This time it is a protest too resolute and significant to be borne down. Furthermore, it was uttered, as she for the first time perceived, in an unknown voice.

“Papa!”

Papa? It was—it must be her father who was standing there in the flickering firelight; who had entered unannounced through the folding doors, and made his way in silence till he reached the point at which she had lifted up her voice to arrest further progress and command attention.

It could not, dared not, be any one else, before whom had been poured forth the pent-up flood—the

outpourings of a sore and angry heart.

It could not be a stranger—and, oh, worst of all! most frightful, most incredible of all! *the* stranger. The very man whose name had been—horror of horrors! the head and front, the centre, the apex of her denunciation.

“Papa?” She trembled from head to foot. Involuntarily she clung to the illusion, but the hoarse, faltering accents betrayed their own uncertainty.

Slowly she left her seat, and staggered upright; and then it seemed as though some one else, not herself, had risen, and was holding by the back of the low chair, confronting with a stupefied gaze a tall figure which should have been different, absolutely, unmistakably different from what it was.

Foolishly she wondered why it should still wear an overcoat, and hold its hat in its hands. The figure

that should have been, was wont to disencumber itself of both in the hall below. Besides it, the other, would have greeted her, chidingly, it might be, but yet in proper paternal fashion. It would not have stood mute, stock-still, with a sealed face and rigid outline.

It was she herself who made the first motion in the stony silence and frozen immobility of the scene. She attempted something; she knew not what.

Probably it was to escape the hideous instant of re-animation by one swift rush; to be gone ere she could be overtaken by it?

But treacherous Nature refused her aid. Her knees shook, the floor seemed to sink from beneath her feet. Like a vengeful giant the apparition of the stranger loomed between her and safety, seemed to tower overhead, to approach nearer, to bend closer—and then—one last

conscious sensation, she was being caught in arms that she was powerless to shake off.

“Ha, Wycliffe? Glad to see you here.” Mr. Lambert, genial and cordial, greeted his guest an hour later. “Lina, you should have had up some tea. Or, better still, stay to dinner, now you are here?” turning again to the visitor. “We dine at seven; keep early hours, you see, and are quite by ourselves to-night. If you will stay and take pot-luck——”

“Thank you. I shall be very glad to stay.”

But he would not stay as he was; he would go home and change, and re-appear in correct dress, with a flower in his button-hole, and a smile in his heart.

A strange experience. Wycliffe had never known its equal. Never felt anything like the thrill of pity,

tenderness, and anxiety with which he had watched the first dawnings of re-awakened life in the fair young form of which he had involuntarily taken possession, as it swayed and slipped from its foothold, and, but for him, would have fallen on the floor.

After the first pang of natural alarm and consternation, he had not pined for interference in the part allotted to him. He had gently borne his fair burden to a neighbouring sofa; laid her thereon; and then, in default of other restoratives, placed upon her brow her own handkerchief wet with her own tears.

Poor little weeper! He had sat down and scanned the pale face upon the pillow; and almost smiled, recalling the moment which had at first, it must be owned, sent an electric shock through his own veins, but which now, within the last sixty seconds, had by some magical meta-

morphosis, been transformed into a pathetic memory.

Almost ere her eyelids had unclosed he had felt the language of imploring penitence in the gaze turned upon him. He had returned it with a look of encouragement. Then the penitent had struggled to draw herself upright. This he had forbidden sternly. Then she had striven to speak. This also had been forbidden. Finally, he had laid his hand on hers, and in slow, soothing accents, as one who would compose and comfort a bewildered child, had spoken. Gracious powers! how he had spoken! Looking back upon the scene it seemed to him as though he had been inspired. Where was diffidence? Where embarrassment? Surely his position ought to have been awkward enough in having to confess that he had not only hearkened, however involuntarily, to confidences meant for another, but had

actually heard himself alluded to as a principal ingredient in a cup whose bitterness had caused floods of tears.

And yet he was sure, positive, that he had experienced no sense of vexation, no confusion of spirit, whilst engaged in the absorbing task.

He had been bent upon reassuring and consoling. As soon as she was able, he had allowed his patient (using the term with an air of medical authority) to tell her own tale, and listened to her broken explanations and stammering apologies with perfect patience, nay, with scarcely an interruption. He saw that it relieved her to make a full confession.

And by-and-by a compact had been entered into between the two. No one was to be told what had happened; not another human being was to be cognisant of Lina Lambert's awful misdemeanour, and its still more appalling sequel. It must

remain forever a secret between them; never to be alluded to, and if possible to be obliterated from the very memory of each.

Lina had been the speaker, the arranger, the dictator; all he had had to do was to promise implicit obedience.

With a seriousness equal to her own he had taken the vows. She had then proceeded: would Mr. Wycliffe give his solemn word that he would not presume upon his knowledge of the secret? Would he, for her sake, (she had been near crying again as she spoke), for her sake, would he not now refuse the hospitality he had openly heard himself begrudged? She could never do away with the shocking fact that he *had* heard it; never cease to feel the shame of that terrible moment; but he could at least assure her of his forgiveness by affording her an opportunity of — of —. He had

gravely protested he would grant the opportunity.

At last Lina had looked at him. For the first time since the beginning of the interview, she had let slip a shy glance of curiosity, and he had fancied, though it might have been only fancy, that speech came more readily thereafter. But there was not much time to improve the advance, if advance there were; for the next ten minutes, and just as a quiet conversation had been entered into, designed to show that the intimacy begun under such unfortunate auspices might now be proceeded with more happily, the interruption occurred whose anticipation had given rise to the whole. The master of the house, who had been detained later than usual at his office, made his appearance, and greeted his daughter's visitor in the manner we have already heard. Without hesitation, and without so much as a

side glance, Wycliffe had met the test, and responded to it as we also know.

With an inward sense of deep-breathed exultation he now made ready for the evening in store. He was conscious of standing on the brink of his fate. Perhaps for the first time in his life he had now a chance of making his way on his own merits with a pretty, charming, natural, and lovable girl. Hitherto he had been too heavily weighted.

But from his first haphazard encounter with Mr. Lambert, it had been obvious that he was being taken merely as a pleasant fellow, of whose position and fortune his new acquaintance was entirely ignorant. The ignorance amused Wycliffe; once or twice he had chuckled inwardly on finding it taken for granted that he was some insignificant unit in the great working hive,

and at its being hinted, kindly and artlessly, that he was, perchance, an unsuccessful one.

Upon this he had ventured further, and cultivated Mr. Lambert's intimacy, always carefully keeping his own secret. He liked the little, cheery, volatile man who so unsuspectingly bade him to his dreary house. That it must be a dreary house he knew; a dull, dingy residence in a vile situation. But somehow his feet had carried him thither unaccountably, in spite of himself, as it were; and he now looked back upon the impulse with an almost superstitious reverence.

It was no longer to him as if he were about to revisit an ordinary house in a common street, for the sake of passing an uneventful evening with two every-day acquaintances. No, he was going to see *her*, and what that meant to Barrington Wycliffe he alone knew. A

glamour was cast over the present; the future shone beneath a halo.

But to all outward seeming the next few hours passed as unremarkably as hours could do. The fair young hostess was shy, serious, and restrained, yet gentle, and responsive withal. The host was animated and easy; the guest, perhaps a shade more earnest in his endeavours to please than so simple an occasion might have seemed to warrant.

But then, "Poor fellow, I dare say he doesn't often dine out," nodded Mr. Lambert to himself; "and though it's not much of a dinner, still it is nicely set out, and Lina has been a good girl, and done her best. Anyhow, it must be better to put your feet under a gentleman's mahogany than to grub in lodgings, or snatch your food in the clatter of a restaurant."

He rejoiced to perceive no sign of sullenness in his daughter's face.

On the contrary, although she often sat with downcast eyes, and her speech was lower and more hesitating than its wont, he could not but fancy that Wycliffe had no fault to find. He felt proud of his girl; she had never shown to greater advantage. It ended in his pluming himself upon his own cleverness; he would know how to manage in future; the way with Lina was to whack out an invitation before her face when she was powerless to gainsay it. That done, she was all the better afterwards for a cheerful evening.

Then his self-congratulation proceeded. Poor little Florrie and Gladdie had been allowed to come down, dressed in their best, and frolic about the drawing-room before dinner; and it was a nice change for them. Wycliffe must have seen what a pretty picture it made, the two fair-haired little

things clinging about their elder sister, and their evident devotion to her. They had exhibited their little painted men and carts, and Wycliffe had gone down on the floor to assist at the performance.

He had told them he had no little sisters, and they had commiserated his hard case. They had demanded to know if he had no sisters at all.

No, he had none at all.

"Not even a Lina?" said little Gladys, twining her fingers fondly round her sister's, and looking first with adoring gaze upwards, and then dolefully at the sisterless, destitute new friend. "Well, we wouldn't like to give you our Lina, you know," and she shook her head with significant emphasis; "we couldn't possibly spare you our Lina." The little speaker had turned very red, because every one laughed, and Lina said quickly that it was the children's bed-time.

Lina had blushed, as was natural, and the blush had not been lost upon her father, nor, he opined, upon another pair of eyes either. He fancied that Wycliffe's gaze rested a full minute on his daughter's abashed and half-averted countenance.

The awkwardness passed, however, by the latter's putting in his word for the revocation of the nursery edict, and in the end the little pair had trotted joyously off, consoled by promises of chocolate-boxes, and divers other whispered visions of delight.

It was not until just before the close of the evening—and it did not close early, we may be sure—that the guest found himself to all intents and purposes once more alone with his young entertainer. In a party of three it is not easy to let fall asides, more especially when these resolve themselves into a question to

which an answer is imperatively demanded. But at length Opportunity, ever kind to the youngest of her devotees, beckoned Wycliffe, and he made haste to embrace her.

Lina was standing by the distant piano, putting up her music, her eyes large and soft, a bright tint upon either cheek.

"I am going to encroach," murmured a voice in her ear. She started; then listened with beating heart, and poor attempt at unconcern. "You made me promise to forget what I heard and saw to-day," said Wycliffe, slowly. He had turned his back upon the room, and was leaning over the piano towards her. "May I dare now to ask—to be allowed—to remember it?"

"Remember it?"

"All unwittingly, I unlocked a treasure," continued he, gazing at her with steadfast, longing eyes. "I had but one peep, and now I

crave for more. We might have known each other, as other people do, superficially, artificially, on the surface, for months and years without having learned as much"—he corrected himself—"without *my* having learned as much of you yourself, of your real, true self, as was revealed to me in one flash this afternoon. That terrible moment! It is no longer terrible to me. Is it to you? And I can't forget it. And I know I never shall. Is it too presumptuous to hope that it may be the beginning——?" He paused for a response.

None came.

"At any rate, absolve me from my promise," he whispered; and caught the shadow of a monosyllable, and took it for an absolution.

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 "Well, now, you see what I did for you!" cried Lina's father, radiant, a month later. "There

were you moaning and groaning, and declaring we were too poor even to have a friend come and dine with us! Quite annoyed because I had asked this very Wycliffe, who I thought would be glad of a meal, and who now turns out to be as rich as Croesus! Quite in a state because I had asked him to a family dinner! I must say you did the civil to him when he came; but he little knew what I had had to go through beforehand on his account. Phew! There was a regular hail-storm! And if I had known who and what Wycliffe really was, I confess I should never have dared to risk an invitation—that is the joke of it! I thought he was a mere waif and stray; cast ashore and stranded in this great, cold-blooded London; whom it would be charity to——”

“Dear papa, you were always so kind-hearted.”

“Aye, aye! It is ‘dear papa’ now,

is it? And I am 'kind-hearted' now, am I? But I rather think it was only a week or two ago that I was all that was reckless and extravagant."

"Papa, I am sorry I ever said or thought so. I was unhappy and over-anxious."

"So you were, my girl; so you were. But now it is all right, and your poor little harassed mind may be easy at last. You have a glorious future before you—the best fellow in the world for your husband, and his fine country-seat for your home. A lucky girl you are, to be sure! But now, my dear," added the little man, with a soberer look on his kindly face, "just one word, Lina, and don't take it amiss. You have got rid of the *house-books*—at least of any worry connected with them; it will be all smooth sailing in that quarter now, I fancy;—but remember, dear girl, that by-and-by there will be other cares and crosses—no

life is without them—and when these come, try not to fret and pine; resolve not to brood over trials and vexations; set yourself *with your face to the sun*, Lina, my darling; think of the blessings, not of the shortcomings of your lot; and see that you honour your God and do credit to His service by rendering it with a cheerful heart.”

His daughter kissed him silently. She had never understood her father before.

“As for me, I must do the best I can without you,” proceeded he, in a lighter tone; “but I can always get along, you know. And Wycliffe has a post in his eye for me; but it is not to be talked about at present. Anyhow, the tide has turned for both of us—I said it would. As for the poor little lassies, I expect they feel as if heaven had opened, such wonderful things happen to them every day, and they are already talking of high

times at 'Lina's home.' So, my dear, I give you joy, and I think you have the fairest prospect of the wish being fulfilled that ever woman had."

But he never knew, for no one ever told him—it remained, and continued to remain, a secret between the lovers, too sacred to be divulged to any one—that the whole structure of their love and happiness had been built upon the grim foundation-stone of "a terrible moment."

JEMIMA: A METAMORPHOSIS

Jemima:

A Metamorphosis



Miss Jemima Sillacombe frankly owned that she did not like to be “put out of her way.” Very few people who have “ways” do.

And as there are still fewer individuals of either sex who, having entered upon their fourth decade of existence, are not possessed of these early harbingers of maturity—especially when the soil has been favourable for their development—it follows that there is a vast crop of small idiosyncrasies, fancies, and foibles flourishing in the world, which are harmless enough in themselves, but which often exert an extraordinary influence on human life.

In the case of Jemima Sillacombe, no one ever thought of denying that Jemima had her share—and a little more—of this unknown quantity. As a matter of fact, she was to the manner born. Method, punctuality, order, routine—these were the very breath of her nostrils.

But then, if a lady who has lived in the same house, in the same style, with the same surroundings and general environment for thirty summers, may not be allowed to cherish her own little “ways,” and map out her own little days, and rise and dress, and drive and dine, and potter about among her birds and flowers, exactly how and when she pleases, who may?

Jemima hurt nobody. Defrauded nobody. Nay, she was an excellent, pious creature, whose ear was ever open to the cry of the needy, whose heart was true, and whose life was pure,—and no one who knew Miss

Sillacombe had ever a hard word for her.

As we have said, she still lived on in the home of her childhood, the only unwedded member of a large family, and also the youngest. From the age of twenty she had been practically in possession of both house and mother, and the pleasant, easy existence then inaugurated, had flowed on ever since.

There was really nothing to ruffle it.

Mrs. Sillacombe, an ample dowager, whose husband had been dead so long that she had almost forgotten what it was not to be a widow, was just the person for whose comfort a daughter could be properly solicitous without any very severe strain on her own. When Jemima had written dear mamma's notes, reminded her of her medicine, and read aloud to her the chief items of the Court Circular column of the

morning paper, she had performed the principal daughterly functions of the day. It only remained to hold an occasional consultation as to calls and shopping, and to inquire what books should be exchanged at the circulating library.

Mrs. Sillacombe saw everything through Jemima's eyes,—or, to be more correct, saw all she cared to see. Nothing beyond the range of her house, her servants, her meals, her daily drive, and her occasional doctor's visit, had any real hold on her attention. Even the affairs of her married daughters—she had no sons—elicited but a flickering and uncertain interest; and if a more than ordinarily startling piece of gossip were brought to her ken, and she were sufficiently roused to put a question or two, and pass a comment on the replies received, Jemima would delightedly exclaim that “dear mamma was quite excited.”

To be plain, the old lady led a stupid, animal existence; and only the genuine sweetness of her daughter's nature could have cast over it any sort of halo.

Jemima was, however, perfectly content. She had never known her mother different; she had never known much of her sisters at all; she felt no lack, had no unsatisfied yearnings.

On the contrary, it seemed to her that she was one of the luckiest persons imaginable, in that she was still an inmate of the beautiful, old, well-appointed domain; still supported in her authority by the grey-headed butler and housekeeper, who had come in her infancy; could still step into the high-swung barouche as regularly as three o'clock came round every afternoon, and, with parcels, books, and letters piled upon the front seat, roll off in state to call at one familiar

door after another,—and still, on her return at the accustomed hour, note no other change than what the seasons brought in the scene which met her eyes, as the drawing-room door opened on the cheerful tea-table and kindly urn ready waiting.

But extend her drive, or take tea elsewhere? Not she! Not Jemima Sillacombe!

She put it upon her mother; but dear mamma would have eaten her muffin peacefully enough half an hour later, if it had been suggested to make a *détour* on the homeward path. No; it was Jemima herself whose watch came out by instinct as the light began to wane on an autumn afternoon, and who would out with the order “Home” before Mrs. Sillacombe could be heard on behalf of a neglected parcel still on the seat opposite.

The parcel could be left another day, Jemima would affirm, wrapping

herself briskly in her driving-cloak. It was too late to do more that day.

Jemima had an hour for everything, and a season for everything. Five minutes with her was a very much longer period than five minutes with most people.

Then she always knew exactly where she ought to be upon the staircase when Thomas issued forth from the back regions to roll the gong for dinner, and what she should be doing when he was heard placing the bedroom candles in the anteroom, preparatory to the night's rest. She remembered on what days the housemaids reigned supreme in their several rooms,—she never invited people to dine on Thursdays, devoted to special plate-cleaning in the pantry,—and she would not have kept coachman and footman out beyond their own tea hour for the world.

"The kindest, consideratist young lady as ever was," Hubbard, the butler, would declare—in proof of which he would loftily abstract the newspaper from under Jemima's very nose. But a young and pert housemaid was heard to cry shrilly back on one occasion, "Lor', she ain't nothen but an old maid born," which made Hubbard very angry indeed.

"I declare, Jemima, I think you are the most enviable person in the world." The speaker was Jemima's eldest sister, a matron of forty-five, who had early left the nest, and was now every inch the mother of a family and mistress of a household. "You are always so cool and comfortable," proceeded Lady Franklin, fanning herself, for she was stout, and the warm weather tried her severely, "and you seem to have time for everything, while I am in a 'drive' from morning till midnight.

And there is Lenny's tea-party this afternoon," she subjoined in an aggrieved tone, which might have been interpreted, "That is the last straw."

"To be sure. His birthday party." Jemima nodded cheerful comprehension. "I am coming, Caroline."

"*Are* you? So good of you." Lady Franklin paused and hesitated. "I don't know how I am ever to get it in, I am sure. I did promise the child, but I did not take in that it meant my flying home after the lecture, and we are dining out, and—"

"You gay person!"

"Indeed, I am not gay, but I am so hurried and worried. Jemima, if I *should* be late—you know what lectures are—they *will* go on and on, and the Dewhursts are particularly anxious to introduce Professor Grimsel afterwards—that is the real reason of my going—could you,

would you mind, if I were not there, sitting down with the children and pouring out tea? I *mean* to be back, of course; only, if I am not——”

“You can depend on me. Don't trouble about it, Caroline. I have arranged to be at your house by four o'clock, and——”

“And that means you will be there.” The elder lady's brow cleared, and she gave a sigh of relief. “Lucky you! You have no one to throw all your plans into confusion at the last moment, as mine are a dozen times in a week. *You* can go and come as you choose. Well, it is something off my mind, at any rate, to know that if I *am* late—you are such a favourite that Lenny will be quite satisfied if I say Aunt Jemima is due at four o'clock for certain—and—and it doesn't put you out of your way?” having now a moment for the afterthought.

“Not at all out of my way. I have kept it in my mind ever since you told me you were giving the party; and the carriage is to be round half an hour earlier than usual, and dear mamma is quite pleased to lunch a little tiny bit sooner in order to be ready. Then I am to be dropped at the Grange as we drive home, and Thomas will bring the pony-cart for me at six, so that I shall just get home in time to dress for dinner.”

A twinkle in the other's eye was lost upon the speaker. (“Goodness gracious! To hear her!” Lady Franklin was saying to herself, betwixt contempt and a species of envy, “she might have been going to Court and a State ball afterwards, for all the forethought bestowed!”) “You have certainly a genius for organisation, Jemima,” observed she, drily.

“I do like to have things fit in,”

Jemima bridled, with modest elation, "and it is quite easy by just giving one's mind to it."

"Humph!"

"I don't speak for you, Caroline. In a household like yours there must be many interruptions and hindrances. But with me," the spinster proceeded, complacently, "it is quite different. I have only dear mamma to consider; and really our servants are so good, and understand our ways so thoroughly——"

"I know—I know. Everything goes on oiled wheels. You roll through life on easy cushions." Lady Franklin evinced a momentary impatience. "And you always look so trim and smart," glancing down at herself, and again back at the fresh, flowering muslin which made her own far handsomer dress look dusty and shabby. "I really have had no time to think about summer clothes,—but you are always in the

van. I said yesterday, when I saw the first light bonnet in the street—I was inside Atkinson's and I just saw the bonnet, not the carriage, through the fallals in the window—I said to Wynn timer, 'That must be Aunt Jemima.' "

"Too bad of you. I am sure I am not a great dresser."

"It isn't that. No; I don't think you dress more than other people. We all get the things in the long-run—only, you are the first. You have the time to attend to it, and to notice that the season is here. There you are now, in that pretty muslin—and it is very becoming, Jemima—you can wear a muslin still—I wish *I* could. A great hot silk—I wonder if I could not have a muslin made a little elaborately, just for the very warm days? I shall ask Miss Johnston; she is such a good dressmaker, she could—But I must not run on, I have a thousand things

to do. You are not going out this morning?"

"Only to the garden. The roses are ready for cutting——"

"Cutting roses? How old fashioned and leisurely it sounds! Dear me, if *my* roses were to wait till I had time to cut them——"

"Yours are wasted, Caroline. I always lament when I go to your rose garden that no one thinks of drying them for the rooms——"

"My dear, who should think?" Again the elder sister manifested a certain pettishness. "Who in our house has time for those fiddy-faddy businesses? *I* haven't. The girls are at their lessons, the servants at their work. If we have visitors, they want to be taken here, there, and everywhere. . It is only you, you fortunate mortal, you petted-by-the-gods Jemima Sillacombe, who can take into your scheme of life even the preservation of the crumpled

rose-leaf, which is not allowed to disturb the surface of your bed of down."

Laughing, and kissing her sister affectionately, Lady Franklin, with recovered good-humour, rustled away; and Jemima, having first restored to its place an antimacassar which had been caught on the point of the departing parasol, and otherwise smoothed down disarrangements—for Caroline never failed to leave disarrangements, to the orderly eye—picked up her basket and scissors, and tripped off to her congenial occupation among the flower borders.

She had been detained for half an hour; but then, she always reckoned on such a chance detention; so told herself, with a sense of being sisterly and indulgent, that it did not put her out of her way, for one must always take into account a married sister living within a few miles in a country neighbourhood.

“I don’t suppose Jemima will ever marry,” cogitated the latter, as she consulted her watch at the same moment as Jemima smoothed out the antimacassar; “she is far too well off as she is. Nothing to worry her, no one to interfere with her; no cares, no troubles, no anxieties. Even when our mother is taken from us—and that we need not anticipate for long enough, with her good health, and easy, regular life; still, she must go some day—but even then Jemima will reign on here happily enough. She will be quite able to afford it; and with the old servants about her, and us so near, and so many neighbours besides, she need never feel lonely. One of us sisters could always spare her a girl to stop with her, if it came to that; or Matilda would come for good, if wanted. She has her poor people, too, and her parish interests; and is on such good terms with everybody

round that, upon my word, most people would consider her the luckiest creature alive. And I fancy she would call herself so." A pause. Then, "I wonder, now—I wonder if a single woman like Jemima really *is* lucky?" cogitated the matron, as a softer expression stole across her brow. "She always appears to be absolutely content and serene. Yet, looking at the case dispassionately, it seems, if one were to speak plainly, rather a selfish sort of happiness. Not that poor, dear Jemima *is* selfish, only she knows no better, and is so entrenched in her own funny little state, that—well, well, it can't be helped. And I don't know what possesses me to think there is anything that needs help, when I am always pretending to envy my sister's easy lot, and sometimes do actually, at the moment, believe my own words! I wonder, now——?"

But she soon forgot to wonder. Her own multifarious concerns, which for the moment had been in abeyance, were again buzzing about her like so many flies, and shut out every other point of the landscape. As usual, she was late in arriving at her little son's birthday party.

The party was in full swing, and a tremendous chattering and laughing sounded through the open door of the room in which it was assembled.

"That cannot be only Jemima," swiftly concluded Jemima's sister. The next minute—"Oh, Bobby!" she exclaimed, in surprise, recognising in Sir William's youngest brother the author of the merriment. "When did you arrive? We had no idea you were in England."

Captain Franklin chuckled like a boy. "No more has any one else, my dear. Hold hard. Give us a fraternal salute," kissing the matronly cheek, which blushed

beneath the unaccustomed tribute. "I have been kissing 'em all round," proceeded the sailor, triumphantly. "Had to, to find out which were my nieces and which weren't. Crime first—punishment afterwards."

"But he didn't kiss Auntie Jem, and she was the only one he missed out," the hero of the day shouted from his birthday seat of honour with the full force of his seven-year-old lungs, an announcement which really seemed in a measure necessary. "And he's brought me a parrot and a tortoise, and he says——"

"He's going to dance a hornpipe," broke in a still shriller treble, "and he says——"

"He's going to take us all to the Circus," a third took up the cry, "and he says——"

"And he says," appeared to be the catch-word.

Lady Franklin strove in vain to be heard above the tumult; she

wanted to be hospitable, genial, welcoming, but she had no chance of being anything. And there was Jemima, too—the din must be absolutely deafening to poor Jemima!

A vision of the dainty figure in its crisp flounces and frills, framed by the large, solemn, massively-furnished drawing-room, which had been present to her mind's eye by fits and starts all through the intervening hours, stood out clearly at the moment. She felt as if she must rescue her gentle, bewildered, little old maid of a sister from this pandemonium.

Tea was over, and she could at least suggest an adjournment. “You are terribly hot in here, and I see you have finished; will not some of you like to come to another room, or——”

“Uncle Bobby is going to dance a hornpipe.” A dozen small voices rang forth together like a peal of

bells; while Uncle Bobby himself, big, brown-bearded, jolly, and sun-burnt, beamed acquiescence.

“How kind! But perhaps Jemima——”

“Aunt Jem wants to see the horn-pipe as much as any of us.” And Aunt Jem smiled assent.

“You poor dear!” murmured Lady Franklin, aside. “Sailors have such overpowering spirits,” she added later, putting her hand to her forehead.

“Quite delightful,” responded Jemima, as though she had been called upon to acclaim.

Lady Franklin looked at her. “Oh, I did not mean *that*. Yes, of course. Sir William always says Bobby makes him laugh more than any one. But I do wish—Bobby’s voice is so *very* loud, and his laugh is perfectly *stentorian*, and he never minds *who* is here, or *what* he does,—but of course I know he is a dear

fellow, and as good as gold, and has the kindest heart in the world. But, my dear Jemima, I did feel for you. I am sure if my head aches, yours must be ten times as bad. And after your putting yourself out to come, and we all know you don't like to be put out of your way——”

“No, no; I am going to convoy Miss Jemima home.” A voice in the rear—a frank, bold, confident voice—made both ladies start as if it had been a pistol-shot.

“I'm coming back, you ruffians,” continued the same speaker, as the swarming crew were shaken off a big central figure, and Captain Franklin emerged to view. “You'll have enough of me, never fear. I'll give you some fun before I'm done with you; but sheer off now. Miss Jemima, it is long since we've met, but we are relations all the same, or what amounts to the same thing—you must let me see you across the

fields; it is such a jolly evening for a walk, and that fellow"—lowering his tone, and eyeing a young and callow footman who had been sent to escort his mistress home, and who was now endeavouring to assume the correct statuesque attitude with only indifferent success—"he can be dispensed with, can't he? We don't want him, do we? 'Tis ever so much pleasanter walking than driving; may I tell him to trot off again?"

"Good heavens! What an odd couple!" cried Lady Franklin, to the group who stood looking after the pair that started presently. "Poor Jemima! There was no way out of it. I could hardly help laughing at her look of utter confusion. She who never sees a man—far less talks to one—what must she feel to find herself let in for a two-mile walk all alone with such an extraordinary specimen of the genus sailor as Bob?"

"Now, do tell me, Jemima, what

you found to talk about, and how you got on," demanded she the next day, having driven over on purpose. "Bobby declared you got on 'like a house on fire.' But then, he always 'gets on like a house on fire' with everybody, and imagines every one else does the same. He is such a rattle——"

"I don't think you should call him a rattle, Caroline."

"*Not?* Not a boisterous, blustering——"

"He can talk most sensibly and agreeably. As soon as we were alone," proceeded Jemima, with animation, "he quite dropped his jokes and—and chaff; and I assure you I never met with any one who—that is to say, we found plenty of subjects in common, and we agreed upon some of them, and, when we did not, I was quite willing to be corrected, for he has seen more of life than I——"

"That is not saying *very* much, is it? However, I am glad if your ignorance came in handy on the occasion. I have always heard that any and every kind of knowledge is sure to come in useful at some time or other, but I never knew before that *want* of it would. So Bobby instructed you? On what points?"

"Ever so many. What a wonderful career he has had! And how much he has seen and done! I do think a sailor's must be a most interesting life. We were looking at the Cathedral tower——"

"The Cathedral tower? From where did you see the Cathedral tower?"

"From—from the Beacon Hill," faltered Jemima; then gathered courage and proceeded: "I hope, Caroline, that I did not do anything impru — unconventional — I mean anything I ought not, in walking round the Beacon with your brother-

in-law. Of course, if I had been a girl—but at my age, and he is over forty—and Sir William's brother—it seemed to me it would have been ridiculous if I had made an objection when Captain Franklin proposed it. I did hesitate, and then his evident wonder and absolute unconsciousness of having suggested anything unusual showed me at once that it would be quite silly to make a fuss."

"Of course." Lady Franklin smiled a little to herself. ("Make a fuss, indeed! Poor dear thing! She is actually blushing! What a perfect innocent she is!") "Now, Jemima, there is something I want to ask you to do for me. I drove over at this unearthly hour on purpose; I knew you would not have stirred out of doors yet. Well, now, listen to me, there's a dear. I am taking Bob to the lawn-tennis party at the Worthingtons this afternoon

—I had not meant to go, but his turning up so unexpectedly puts out all my plans, and Sir William would not like it if I were to turn him adrift. So I must sacrifice myself, as usual, and drive in exactly the opposite direction to what I had intended. But as I know you always go into Maltburgh on a Tuesday, will you call at the library and leave this list, and also this order at the butcher's, and this prescription at the chemist's? It does not matter about waiting to have it—the prescription—made up. They can send it out; only, it ought to be left early in the afternoon;" and she proceeded to enlarge.

Jemima in silence accepted the commissions. She certainly did drive into Maltburgh on Tuesdays; it was her invariable rule to do so; and any deviation from her rule would have—no, she was not prepared to deviate.

"Now, Bobby, I am going to introduce you to all the pretty girls in the neighbourhood," quoth Bobby's hostess, a few hours later, as she took her seat in an open barouche and unfurled her parasol. "Rose Hall, Thomas."

"Always ready for pretty girls," responded her companion, promptly. "And you are right to do it sharp, Caroline. A week is my limit, and then I'm off."

"Only a week?"

The sailor laughed. "A week is a week to us jack-tars. We're bound to scud through life with our topsails flying. I shall be friends with every friend of yours by the end of my week, and—I say, I've begun already. Began yesterday with Miss Jemima, and we're quite chummy to-day——"

"To-day? But you haven't seen her to-day?"

"Haven't I though?" Captain

Bob laughed again. "You had not quitted the field ten minutes before I was on it. We've had another walk——"

"No?"

"I strolled over to pay my respects to your mother, as I was not allowed to go in yesterday, and found your sister just starting for her round of poor people in the village. I went round with her."

"My dear Bob! With Jemima? Why, she never allows *any one* to go with her to her poor people. It must have put her dreadfully out of her way."

"I dare say it did,—but she didn't say so. I asked if she were going to this tennis party——"

"Jemima at a tennis party! I wish I had heard you. What did she say? Was she not amused?"

"Not at all. What was there to amuse? I thought everybody went to tennis parties. I thought it was

the favourite, not to say the only, form of dissipation in a country place."

"But Jemima never goes in for dissipation. I don't mean to say that she absolutely abjures tennis parties; only, if she appears at them, she stays about half an hour, keeping the carriage waiting all the time, takes a sip of tea and a stroll round the garden, and retreats before any of the real fun of the fair begins. She never goes to the Worthingtons' at all, because it is so far off. You must know that Jemima never keeps coachman and horses out beyond a certain hour; and if a house is ever so pleasant, and old Jenkyns declares—and I believe he often invents, too—that it is a mile beyond what he considers his horses can do, there is an end of the matter. Between ourselves, Jemima is the veriest old maid——"

"*Is she?*" said Bob, significantly. His eyes danced above his brown beard; he had found a stimulus hitherto wanting in his smooth career.

Five days passed, and Sunday came—a midsummer Sunday, sweet and heavy with odorous blossoms, fiercely hot in the sun, but delicious in the shade. Morning service and the early dinner which followed in Mrs. Sillacombe's well-regulated household were over, and the old lady had retired to doze in her bedroom.

Jemima had put on a cooler dress, and laid bonnet, gloves, parasol, and prayer-book on her bed, in readiness for six o'clock, at which time she would again sally forth in response to the chiming of church bells. Jemima never had her accoutrements put back in wardrobe and drawers on Sundays; her maid's services were dispensed with

till night; and she invariably laid out the little array upon the bed in exact parallel lines.

Having done so on the present occasion, there was a slight, a very slight, deviation from her usual method of procedure: instead of walking straight to the arm-chair by the open window, as was her wont, she made a movement, an absent-minded movement, in the direction of the mirror, and from her toilet-table took up a comb. Jemima's hair curled a little, naturally, upon her forehead. With the tail of the tortoise-shell comb Jemima drew down the little curls on either side of the parting, and poked them about.

She then took up a hand-glass, and deliberately examined the side view of her head and profile.

Finally, she turned straight round and looked at her back.

There was nothing amiss with the

back, nor yet with the ruffled frill at the neck; while as for the hair, it was glossy, trim, and dressed to perfection—as she esteemed perfection. A shade too stiff it had been where the rippling waves drew back from the still smooth and somewhat pensive brow, but this, as we know, had been rectified, and yet it was a full half-hour ere the occupant of the luxurious bedchamber quitted it, and, gliding downstairs, passed through a side door which opened into the garden.

Jemima was going to read her book out of doors. Here was innovation number two within the space of sixty minutes.

Tripping lightly through the flower borders, scarcely distinguishable amidst their brilliant profusion, Miss Sillacombe made her way to a wooded bank which sloped towards the west, from whence a lovely view of the country beyond could be

obtained, including—but of that she made no account, of course—the path which any one coming from the Grange would probably traverse.

Here the little lady paused and instinctively scrutinised the rustic seat which, under the cool shade of overspreading boughs, invited a sojourn.

Jemima was not very fond of rustic benches with ragged pieces of bark protruding, to say nothing of earwigs and spiders. She would have preferred a nice clean garden chair, and could easily have carried one, or had it carried for her, from the cupboard in the hall, but she could not exactly have suggested any necessity for more than one, and such necessity might just possibly arise. She preferred to run the gauntlet of spiders and bark, and, after a moment's hesitation and a little careful arrangement of her

spotless flounces, settled herself and opened her book.

A hum of insects and the tapping of a woodpecker on the dry stem of a fir tree close behind, alone fell upon her ear for some lapse of time; yet it is notable that even the snap of a dry twig or the rustle of a withered leaf caused the reader to catch her breath and bend a little lower the head, which was resolved to show it was not going to incline towards intrusive sounds. "He shall find me calmly reading," said Miss Jemima, to herself.

And at length there could be no mistake. The calmness, the decorum, the feint of entire absorption in the volume which lay upon the lady's spotless lap, were to be called into play. Steps were certainly approaching.

Pit-a-pat goes Jemima's heart. Nearer and nearer they come—so near are they now that a more wily

diplomatist would have raised a languid eye and dreamily investigated; but those of our modest spinster were still nailed to the open page, when, "Upon my word, my dear sister, you are deaf as a post!" was shouted almost into her hat brim.

"I came through the wood," pursued Lady Franklin, dropping exhaustedly on the seat, which had been brushed with a view to another occupant. "Though it is so much longer, it is everything to have shade on a day like this. But if I had known it was so hot, I should have let Bob come instead of me, as he offered to do. I did half let him; only, I thought it would have put you out of your way, as you never do have visitors on Sundays."

She then divulged her business, which was of the ordinary type between sisters living in close proximity, and proceeded:

“But how is it you are sitting out here? I thought you all went to sleep in your rooms on Sunday afternoons. It is not your way to——”

“My way?” For once the poor badgered Jemima turned a red cheek and a frown upon her tormentor. “To hear you talk, Caroline, one would think I was a perfect machine! Can I do nothing that is not ‘my way’? I do wish”—then the speaker recollected herself. “It is not my ‘way’ to be cross, at any rate, is it, dear?” she smiled a little ruefully; “but, to tell the truth, you startled me just now, and you know I am not accustomed to being taken by surprise——”

“So I told Bob. I caught him sloping off in this direction, and he owned he was just going to look round here,—you know he always ‘drops in’ and ‘looks round’ on people, and never dreams of not being welcome anywhere, — and I

said, 'You will only put Jemima out of her way,'—oh, my dear, I forgot it vexed you to hear this,—but the fact is, we always *do* say it. And if it hadn't been for me, the tiresome fellow would have been over this evening, just when you were starting for church! He declared he must say 'Good-bye,' as he is off to-morrow,—and Goodness knows when we shall see him again!—for though he is leaving the Navy after this cruise, no one has the slightest notion where he proposes to settle down, and it may be at the uttermost parts of the earth,—but I said I would carry all messages, for you *always* went to church on Sunday evenings, and would not like to be put out of—Ha! ha! ha! I am afraid I did say it, Jemima; and I assure you Bob was quite as indignant as you are. He muttered something as if he thought he knew better than I about it. Perhaps you really would

have liked him to come and say 'Good-bye'?" she suggested, as with a momentary afterthought.

"It—it doesn't matter, Caroline."

A low, faintly-uttered response.

"I will take any message you like, you know."

Jemima was silent.

"Shall I wish him *Bon voyage*?"

Jemima turned away her head.

"Jemima — Jemima — shall I let him come here to-night?"

A running tear splashed on to the page of Jemima's book.

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"Yes, go—go in, and win!" cried Lady Franklin, waving her handkerchief in triumph to an expectant figure, as she almost flew home, stout and heavy as she was, ten minutes afterwards. "Go, and God speed you. Don't lose a minute—not a minute. My dear Bob, I am so glad—so happy. I can hardly speak. What are you doing out here in the

open sun?"—for he had come half-way to meet her in his impatience, and was now standing open-mouthed in the midst of a broiling, dusty road, all unconscious of its demerits. "Find me an ounce of shade, and I will tell you all about it, and you shall own I am cleverer than you ever dreamed, and——"

"And kinder," cried the sailor, seizing both her hands and wringing them with terrific fervour. ("Oh, my rings!" she moaned to herself, as they dug into her soft flesh. But she uttered no syllable aloud.)

"But for your putting me on my mettle," continued the grateful brother, "I don't know that the first idea of such a thing would ever have occurred even to my presumption. You piqued and provoked me, Caroline. I know now you did it on purpose. Then, when you had prepared the ground, you let fall a seed of hope, without which I should

never—but no matter. Out with your tale! Bless you for it! Go on with your finding your sister——”

“Sitting outside, on the edge of the wood, with a book before her *upside down!* A fact; it was. So deeply interested that she never heard me till I was looking over her shoulder! Then such a start, and such blank, instantaneous, unmistakable disappointment! It is too bad of me to reveal the secret of that dear innocent heart; and if I had not known *your* feelings——! But, my dear brother, you must never betray me. No, indeed; not through years and years to come. Jemina possesses what is a very rare treasure in these days, a real sense of delicacy; and it would be outraged—I am quite in earnest when I say this—by her knowing that I went there this afternoon for no other purpose than to spy out the land for you. We must keep our own secret

—at any rate until the wedding is over. I *thought* it was all right; but with a person like my sister I could not be sure—she was so very careful, so very anxious not to betray herself. And then, you know, I feared that from her point of view she had so much to lose.”

“So she has.” Captain Franklin’s brow slightly clouded.

“Not a bit of it. She will gain a hundred thousand times the value of every item. Look at the two sides of the question. Would *you* put—would any true-hearted man or woman put—comfort, luxury, leisure, and an empty, barren life (for that is what it amounts to in dear Jemima’s case)—against the love of a good man, the devotion of a warm, honest heart, the pleasures of companionship, the fresh sympathies and interests, the myriads of new friends, the very self-sacrifices so dear to a gentle, womanly soul?” (She had been say-

ing this so often to herself that it now poured out as from a pent fountain-head.) "Oh, my dear Bob," cried the affectionate creature, her eye moist before the picture she had conjured up, "have no fears; there will not be a happier woman in all the countryside than your wife. You may have to live in a cottage, and jog her about in a pony-cart, and rake your own gravel, and mow your own lawn—she will find it all delightful. Her sweet nature is cramped and warped as it is; it will expand beneath your so-called privations. Jemima will grow younger every year——"

"She will—she will."

"Of course she will. Instead of rule and rhythm, starched primness and narrow-mindedness—(those are not the real fruits of Jemima's nature, only the weeds of the soil)—we shall have her joining in every freak, trotting at your heels to every

gathering, turning upside down all her old notions,—you are the very man for her; I long to see the day. Away with you now; you will catch her somewhere, somehow. I leave it in your hands; only, if I don't see you both come smiling in to supper this evening——”

And in they came.

And every prediction above recorded was fulfilled to the letter. Indeed, it was quite a joke to the county the fashion in which Captain and Mrs. Franklin conducted their married life. They never did anything like other people; they never knew where they were going or what they were likely to be about. They dashed hither and thither—always together—always radiantly happy and good-humoured—always ready for anything and everything that turned up. When Jemima saw her sister Matilda (a widow, who thankfully succeeded to her place as

daughter at home, only bargaining that her children should be established there also, which Lady Franklin said was quite proper and natural), when Jemima saw the widow roll off in the well-known barouche from a social gathering, long before any one else thought of moving, and remembered that Matilda was now as punctilious about servants' meals and horses' legs as she had once been, she chuckled to herself as she gaily waved a parting hand; and she smiled again broadly and contentedly as she jogged home beneath the moon, four or five hours later, she and her husband having been kept almost by force to an impromptu supper and a merry evening. These sort of impromptus rapidly grew to be the most natural things in the world, in her eyes.

When a voice would be heard pealing through the small domain,

"Jemima—Jemima—get on your togs, and come for a day's outing," at the smallest possible notice, Jemima flew to obey, and flew past the clock without ever once glancing at it.

And she never troubled to inquire how or when she was to find time for this and that, which had to be done sometime. She dashed off notes instead of writing letters. She kept whole flower borders in blossom instead of snipping roses. She read newspapers and magazines, and knew what was going on in all sorts of out-of-the-way places, instead of contenting herself with the Court Circular and the leading paragraphs.

She revelled in hospitality, and Bob's friends wired they were coming down upon her to luncheon or dinner without an instant's hesitation. She walked through the mud to meet them at the station, if

Bob couldn't go and the pony was needed.

One and all agreed she was the jolliest little bride—and when the baby came——!

THE JUBILEE SEAT

The Jubilee Seat



Kent is a pleasant, sweet-smelling county to dwell in; it is also cheap and convenient for a battered old sea captain, who has done with tar and pitch and ocean waves, and has a wife and family to think of. Captain Butterworth—good old Tom, of the *Mary Jane*, who had faithfully served her owners for many a year, and was now pensioned off and rheumatic—had fancied that the ruddy woods and chalky hollows of his birthplace would suit him in more respects than one when looking about for some quiet haven in which to cast his final anchor; and he had found as snug a berth, according to himself, as ever an old decrepit salt could swing his hammock in.

In other words, he had succeeded in turning a pretty and comfortable farmhouse into as close a resemblance to a taut merchantman as masts, figureheads, and every sort of marine relic erected at intervals could. Purfoy Farm was the amusement of the neighbours, and its decoration and embellishment the very breath of old Butterworth's nostrils.

The captain himself was the only man about the place. He had a wife and several daughters, while a couple of country lasses did the rough work of the establishment; but as the worthy fellow had been shrewd enough to shut his eyes to the blandishments of agricultural agents, and positively limit his energies and his expenditure to the small garden and paddock which went with the farmhouse—permitting others to annex its hop-fields and pasture-lands—he had no need

of male hands other than his own; and mowed his own grass, cut his own vegetables, and shook down the fruit from his own orchards year in and year out, with a cheery zest and independence, that it did one's heart good to see.

Inside, it is true, Mrs. Butterworth held her sway, and it was the by no means inconsiderable one of an invalid—an invalid to whom was brought every item of household intelligence, before whom every plan was laid, and without whose sanction nothing could be undertaken.

From her couch in the low parlour window, round which in summer the roses swung and clustered, the pale sweet face was ready with its smile, and the thin white hand with its wave of recognition to every passing figure, and there were two at least of the home circle who never failed to look round and shout a greeting or

remark, whenever they came within range of those patient, watchful eyes.

“Ho, old girl, got you a nice bunch of turnips this morning!” The captain would pause in his trudge up the little path, put down his basket, and hold up in review its contents. (“She likes to see everything,” he would say to himself.) Anon it would be, “Now, Bess, I’m off to take a turn with the mowing-machine. I sha’n’t be round here for a bit yet; but you’ll hear me and it going along. You’ll know where we are. We start at the far end of the grass, and work this way, in and out. When you hear us stop, we shall be at the walnut tree. We turn there and go back. (She likes to hear all about it,” he would nod himself off, his sunburnt face glazing gaily in the sun.)

Molly, too, remembered that her mother liked to hear about things.

Molly would bring peas and gooseberries to shell or husk beneath the window, and always took care to have something on hand, which brought her there, at what time her father's manifold duties lay in other directions. They arranged this together. Ernestine, the next daughter, was not to be depended upon. Ernestine would promise and forget.

Moreover, Ernestine could not see why her mother could not sometimes be left alone for an hour or two, since mother herself declared she was happy and content with her books and work. Could she not take a nap, if her eyes were tired?

And Ernestine did think it was rather absurd the way in which her father and Molly flew to the window with every silly piece of news, however trifling; as if it could possibly interest any one to hear that a Sunday school treat was passing along

the lane, or that the miller's cart had broken down going over the bridge where the two streams met! Ernestine, or Nesta, as she was called in the home circle, was, to tell the truth at once, the only discordant member of it. The younger sisters, the school-girls, Amy and Prilly, were as full of spirits, as good-humoured, amiable, and affectionate as the jolly captain and his first-born; but Nesta was "difficult."

"We put it down to her having been brought up by an aunt—owing to my being away in the West Indies, and mother ill." This from the worthy captain in confidence. "We think the good lady—to be sure, she meant well, and Nesta is her god-daughter—but the fact remains that Mrs. Miller put ideas into our girl's head. Seems as if she couldn't settle down to our small ways and be comfortable, after the grand house in St. George's Square.

She always harps upon London. But Mrs. M. has girls of her own to take about now, and Nesta don't get asked as she used to. Her cousins ain't exactly handsome, d'ye see? Well, it's not for me to say, but they tell me—folks who ought to know do—that Nesta is too pretty a creature to be made free of any house full of daughters. And she is not just what you may call easy to get on with. There's Molly now—that lassie never wants *anything* for herself. It's always, 'Oh, that will just do for mother,' or, 'That's the very thing Nesta was longing for,' and Miss Nesta takes it as if it were her right! Still, I am not denying she's a pretty creature—at least, so folks tell me"—hastily correcting himself—"and if she had never been at that horrid house—if Jessie Miller had never taken her up, and put it into her head to look down on plain ways, and fret after finery and

tomfoolery, she would never have thought of it for herself. But there! She's our daughter, mother's and mine, and she must have *some* stuff in her, bless her!" the old voice would round off in a contented chirrup, and the momentary cloud which the thought of Nesta's aunt and the house in St. George's Square (to his simple mind the apex of fashion) never failed to evoke, would pass from the speaker's brow.

"It is a pity she always reads the London papers," said Mrs. Butterworth.

But Ernestine refused to see that any harm could come from London papers. Her father read, and why not she?

Moreover, she took in the *Queen*; and it is safe to say that not an entertainment was given, not an engagement announced, nor a piece of society gossip chronicled that Ernestine Butterworth—albeit the

names of those concerned were to her but names and nothing more—did not pore over the lines, and find in them food for envy and desire.

And now we must proceed with our little story.

The month was June, and the year the recent one of glorious commemoration. Nothing was being thought of or talked of but the Diamond Jubilee, and ways and means of viewing the Royal Progress.

“That settles it,” said Captain Butterworth, laying down paper and spectacles at one and the same time. “I had thought—well, I didn’t see the last Jubilee, being at sea; and none of you girls saw it either—so I did think that maybe if a guinea would have done the lot——”

“A guinea!” It was Ernestine’s scornful voice which struck in. “A guinea! Why, dear me, father, one

would suppose you never read anything, and never even heard people talk. The seats are to be——”

“Aye, aye, lass, hold hard; the old man is neither so blind nor so deaf as you think. I know well enough—it is plain enough here,” tapping with his glasses the outspread sheet upon his knee, “what folks will have to pay who want to see their Queen on Jubilee Day, and what I say is, that settles the question. The sight is not for us; not for poor people, who haven’t strength to stand in the streets——”

“To stand in the streets! I should think not, indeed.”

“You are as like to stand as you are to sit, my girl,” said the old captain, quietly; and took out his pipe. An obstinate look had stolen over his features; the lips protruded, the shaggy eyebrows knitted themselves together.

“It’s all up now,” muttered Ernes-

tine, beneath her breath. She knew the signs.

But although the case was desperate, she could not bring herself to hold her tongue.

“You need not at least tantalise us by saying what might have been,” she cried, passionately. “It is bad enough, as it is. And here is Cousin Mat coming home from Australia—coming, he says, on purpose to see the Procession, and the part their fellows take in it. He will think it odd that not one of us, his own relations and the only ones he has, can even go up from here—an hour’s journey—while he crosses the ocean, travels thousands and thousands of miles—”

“With thousands and thousands of pounds to do it on. Mat’s a rich man, I am a poor one. He can afford whatever he chooses; and I think all the better of him for being keen enough about the honour of his

colony and all that; I think he is doing the right thing to make a dash for the old country, and send up his cheer for the Queen among the rest of us."

"The rest of us? I wish it were."

"Even though he has to start off in a fortnight's time," pursued the old seaman, unheeding. "He calls it a 'short stay,'—I don't see that. We were rarely longer at any port; and no doubt Mat will put enough into that blessed fortnight to last him for a lifelong memory. 'Twill be something to look back upon all his days."

"But *we* are to see nothing of it," said Ernestine, bitterly. "And he wrote that he hoped to 'join our party,' and would 'help to escort his fair cousins.' How mean and shabby he will think us! How amazed and disgusted he will be!"

"Can't help that, my girl;" the captain, whose pipe was now alight,

smoked in affected unconcern which hid, as it was meant to do, a not inconsiderable share of his own perturbation. He did not mean to give in; and the best armour in which he could encase this resolution was that of outward indifference. Let Nesta once perceive that he was vulnerable on the point of supposed meanness, that he dreaded confessing to his prosperous nephew the scantiness of resources which compelled him to forego witnessing the Royal Procession, and she would certainly take advantage of his weakness. Happily she had some pride; she could be depended upon not to let fall the slightest hint which could be construed into an appeal, when Mat, the Australian, turned up; but she would give her own people no peace. He must hold her at bay.

Accordingly, he smoked either in silence or with an occasional sarcasm which had all the effect he could

have hoped. The beauty was in tears at last, tears of mortification and anger.

"If he even minded, it would not seem so cruel," sobbed she to Molly, recounting the interview, "but father is so hard-hearted. One would think he had never been young and—and pretty."

Molly laughed at her; turned the joke against her; finally gave her one gentle, positive assurance that the thing could not be done—and a sudden sigh escaped as she spoke.

"I know you care," quoth Nesta, slightly mollified, "you have been thinking and thinking of it as well as I. What I thought was, if we two could have gone, and Mat with us—"

"It would have been nice, awfully nice. He would have known so much about it. And he would have told us who the big people were; and we would have cheered his Colonials."

“And we would have worn our white hats and frocks,” Ernestine shook her brown curls sorrowfully. “We have been keeping them for this all along. And, Molly, what vexes me more than anything is that all those Miller girls, every single one of them, is going; they have had their seats for ever so long in the Borough; not the best, of course; but as good as any of their set have got, and I did think father could have afforded us the same. Two guineas each is not so very much; and if Mat——”

“I doubt if Mat would be content with those seats,” quoth Molly, shrewdly.

“Oh,” said her sister. Ernestine, for all her experience in St. George’s Square, was not as wise in the world’s ways as the keener-witted, more observant girl by her side.

“I think you are wrong,” she said, however, after a minute’s pause.

"Any one would be willing to do what the Millers do; they know what's what; and if we had a chance of seats in the Borough—"

"Of course we would jump at them. My dear, who am I, or who are you, to turn up our noses at seats in the gutter, let alone the Borough, if they came in our way? But the thing is, Nett, that we haven't the money. We have not got it;" very emphatically. "It isn't only the seats, there would be the train tickets both ways; and we should have to sleep in town, and the getting to our places—what are the Millers doing about that?" she inquired, suddenly.

"They are breakfasting at five, and are to be in their room by six o'clock," owned Nesta, reluctantly. "They have made out the whole thing, and kept talking about it before me all the time I was there on Thursday. When I said we had

nothing arranged, they looked at each other, and Ethel and Annie exclaimed both at once: 'You poor things!' I said something about our running up for the day, and you should have seen Aunt Jessie's face. Oh, of course, we should have to sleep in London.'

"There, you see!"

"All the same, it is too bad. We are not as poor as hundreds of people who are going; those dreadful little Spratts have seats in St. James's Palace, think of it! St. James's Palace! No one knows how they got them; but I suppose through some of the servants. And Margaret Robsen is to be at the War Office; and it seems as if everybody could get in *somewhere* except ourselves," tears again rising, "it will seem to Mat as if only his relations of all the people in England could not crawl into a corner to see the great Jubilee Procession."

Molly turned away without speaking. She felt as if for once her sister, the sister who often talked so foolishly and irrelevantly, were in the right.

"Is there no way in which it could be managed?" was now Nesta's cry, recurred to at shorter and shorter intervals. The poor girl really suffered; and there was nothing to distract her thoughts, for every one who came to Purfoy Farm was full of the one theme, and she had to hear its changes rung from every point of view.

"The thing is growing into a perfect nuisance!" muttered Captain Butterworth at last.

Only Molly felt for and with Ernestine. "It is hard to be so pretty and bright, and feel that she could enjoy everything so much, and that perhaps Mat would admire her and fall in love with her; oh, what nonsense I am talking!" cried the

little homely sister, blushing at herself, "but I do think Nett has more to be said for her than father and mother imagine. They cannot enter into a girl's feelings. They do not even see, because I don't grumble aloud as poor Nesta does, that I am in my heart hankering after the fun too. I don't know when I have cared about anything so much."

This "caring" of her sister was in truth Ernestine's only consolation. The two for once felt alike, and drew together in a common grief. Instead of going to bed each apart in her own little chamber, Nesta half-shyly at first, more confidently afterwards, was heard to tap at Molly's door, and, brush in hand, suggest that the night was too hot for bed all at once, and that the two might talk for a while in Molly's little dormer window which stood open. Perhaps it was these talks which drew from

Molly that gentle defence of her sister and those excuses which at once exasperated her father and moved him to admiration. "If that isn't the sweetest little nature in the whole world!" he would exclaim. But he found Ernestine more and more "difficult."

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"'Pon my word, you don't deserve it!" But pleasure shone in Captain Butterworth's eyes as he hurried up from the small gate of his domain with an open telegram in his hand. "Here, you monkey," throwing it to his younger daughter, and still keeping up a pretence of high disdain, "here's your precious Jubilee seat come at last. You have worried for it enough in all conscience."

"Oh, father—father, it really is! Mother, do you hear?" Nesta with blazing blue orbs turned to one and the other in her ecstasy of exultation. "And to go with them—the

Millers—and sleep at their house both nights and perhaps longer! Oh, how good, how kind! Dear Aunt Jessie! Molly," as Molly, attracted by the outcry, came flying up, "Molly, dear, only hear the news; Aunt Jessie has sent for one of us"—on a sudden the speaker's voice stopped short as though it had seen a ghost.

Molly, however, perceived nothing.

"For the Jubilee?" cried she, in answering excitement. "Oh, how glorious, how delightful! Let me see the telegram. Why, it is to go up this afternoon! Father, we must send to Surrey's about the pony-cart at once. I can go. Only," she paused. "I ought to help you with your packing, Nett. But if you could run up now, and put out your things, I could be back in time to do the rest. The 5:30 train will do. Is there any answer, father?"

"Answer went straight away, my lass. Your old dad knew what it would be. There was no need to consult you this time, and the reply was pre-paid."

"What did you say?" demanded Ernestine, in rather a low voice.

"Say? Said 'All right, and many thanks.' Short and sweet. There was nothing more wanted."

"You—you did not say which daughter?"

"Which daughter? Nay, there is no need for that," the captain laughed. "No need to tell the Millers, or any one who knows this house, which daughter gets all the good things."

Ernestine hastily left the room.

"Eh?" said the captain, opening his eyes. "She felt that, did she? But 'tis as well she should hear it for once, poor child. And maybe she will think of it even in her fine Jubilee seat."

"Father, don't be hard; dear father, you do not mean it, but that was a cruel thought. Nesta is not so selfish as you think; she is only——"

"Look here, Moll, truth is truth. Was there ever any question either with Nesta herself or with any single one of us who should be the person to accept your aunt's invitation? You are the elder. The telegram says 'One of your daughters,' yet no one for a moment hesitated between the two. That speaks for itself, my girl," as there ensued a pause during which Molly hung her head in silence. "However, I'll say no more," pursued her father, "and to be sure, I dare say the Millers meant Nesta, though they would not pass you over. And now that she has got her way, she will be more peaceable; for I dare say it has fretted her a bit, being as she is a pretty creature—at least, so folks tell me"—and he rambled on.

Molly was half-way across the fields, ere he had said his say for the time being.

The day was broiling, and the ground heavy from recent thundery rain (we all remember how unsettled was the weather during that tumultuous Jubilee week), so that it took the willing little messenger longer than she had expected to reach the village inn, whence a pony-cart could be hired, and by the time she had hurried back across the miry field-path, Molly expected to find an expectant head prospecting from Nesta's bedroom window; but no head was there. "She is too happy to be impatient," concluded the sister, "and I can pack while she dresses. There is plenty of time."

Accordingly she pattered upstairs, taking off her hat as she went, and thankful for the shade within the cool farmhouse; and there on the landing was Nesta, and——

"Hush!" said a voice, Nesta's voice, but suppressed in a strange fashion, "come in here, quick; I have got everything ready, and you are not to say a word."

The door closed, and we will not open it to spy.

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"Heyday, what's this?" the old captain opened his mouth and shut it again, confounded beyond the power of speech. He was standing in the porch, the pony-cart was at the door, and the luggage was in. But the traveller—who—who was the traveller?

"Oh, father, dear, she would make me go; father, I could not help it; I begged and prayed, and all Nesta would say was——"

"Never mind what Nesta said." Nesta was busy tucking a bunch of roses into the pretty shirt front which was her own, yet now peeping from Molly's little coat.

"There, doesn't she look nice? Let mother see you, Mollkins, and I will run for a glass of milk, for I know you can't eat;" and she vanished.

"Shiver my timbers!" exclaimed the captain, nailed to the spot.

Molly it was who was trembling all over, as deeply ashamed and remorseful as though detected in a crime, scarcely even yet to be forced into compliance. "Father—mother—she would not let me ask you, she would not even let me tell you. Everything was ready when I went upstairs; she would put in all her own best things that she thought I would want; and she was so dear and kind," an irrepressible sob, the father turned his head and whistled softly, the mother's eyes glistened—"what could I do?" proceeded the criminal (she really felt herself to be one), "she hustled me into my clothes, and did my hair herself."

"Now, then, time's up!"—a gay

reminder from the doorway. "Drink, sister mine, and be off! Happiness go with you!"—an affectionate kiss. No one was supposed to see that Nesta's eyes were moist or that there was any suspicious redness in the lids.

"Really, father, she must go; you know how full the train will be!" And all in a bustle, poor Molly, still in a kind of dream, was swept from the door.

Captain Butterworth took one stride up to his remaining daughter and held out a sunburnt hand. Not a word did he say, but its grasp and the look and nod by which it was accompanied were felt to the girl's inmost soul.

She would not allow herself to feel dull when the excitement was over.

"If Moll is taking my place, I have got to take hers." And in and out went the light figure—Nesta here, Nesta there—no one had ever known

Nesta so busy and so cheerful—until at last there came a pause in household tasks, and from the lower garden, among the sweet peas and mignonette, there rose into the pure evening air the sound of a woman's singing.

"I scarcely expected to find any of my fair cousins at home!"

An unmistakable arrival had taken place. Day after day the inmates of Purfoy Farm had hoped to see their expected relation appear from the Antipodes, until at last it became so obvious that something had happened to delay his journey that the sisters had come almost to hope—it might be selfishly, but they could not help it—that he would not appear upon the scene till Jubilee Day was over.

"At least we may be spared that!" Nesta had sighed, with doleful resignation.

But now here was Mat, and it was

only Jubilee Eve. Her heart, in spite of a sudden thump, sank a little.

It was something, however, that one of them should have gone, and, Molly being the elder, all would seem natural; and—and she had on a clean sprigged muslin, ready for anything that might turn up (it had been donned on purpose to show to all whom it might concern that Nesta was not moping). So, putting a brave front upon it, up she rose from the strawberry-bed, over which she had been stooping, and—

“How do you do, Cousin Mat?” said she, readily. “We have been expecting you for ever so long!”

Expecting him, had she? “Faith,” thought Mat Butterworth to himself, “if I had known I was being ‘expected,’ and by such a goddess!” And he sat down in the rose-arbour by Ernestine’s side.

“She has told you all about it, I

suppose," said the old captain, strolling down to call them in presently. "My word, those Jubilee seats! Swindles, that's what I call them! I hope, nephew, I do hope you have not been let in for anything outrageous; though, of course, you know your own business best. But five, ten, fifteen guineas—anything you like to name—is the order of the day. And for what? Eighteen inches of hard board! And there you have to sit frying in dust and heat!—"

"Certainly, it is a vast deal pleasanter here," said the young man, frankly. And, being of an open nature and bred to straightforward dealing, he saw no harm in adding presently, "I am fortunate, uncle, to find one of my cousins at home; and though, no doubt, she would rather be in London——"

"She let Molly go," said Captain Butterworth, quickly. "What? Am

not I to say it? Oh, but it's only fair! It was between them, d'ye see. And, poor things, they were both simply off their heads to go; but—well, well, I say no more. What about yourself, Mat? Are you off to-night, or will the morning train do for you?"

"Certainly not to-night. Yes, yes, the morning; any morning train will do."

The captain stared. "'Any' morning train! What are you thinking of, young man? If you don't start before break of day——"

"I have my seat, you know, sir."

"You have? And a good one, I'll be bound. But how are you going to get to it? That's the point. If it's in the Borough——"

"It is not in the Borough."

"Humph, the Strand, then? Or Fleet Street? The cram will be still worse in Fleet Street or the Strand."

"It is in a corner window of Piccadilly looking down St. James's Street," said Mat, the colour suffusing his brown cheek, for he had meant to keep this back if he could. "So, you see, any time will do."

"Fifteen or twenty guineas, eh?" The captain swallowed something in his throat. "And you seem as indifferent about getting there——"

"I am indifferent."

Now, how was it that, though Nesta was looking the other way, she not only heard an underlying meaning in the accents, but knew that a certain pair of dark eyes were turned full upon her face and rested there while her cousin spoke? She twisted off a moss-rose and smelt it.

"I am so jolly indifferent," continued the bronzed Australian, deliberately, "that I doubt very much if I shall take the trouble to attempt it. Why should I? You are not going, my aunt is not going"—a

pause, then—"and Ernestine is not going," concluded the speaker, softly.

After the evening meal, he asked Ernestine to go out again with him. Why not? She was his cousin; and, besides, if a man is not to have a girl to himself, how can he tell whether the pretty face be nothing but a pretty face, or whether the dawnings of a deeper feeling than mere admiration within his bosom may dare expand into maturity?

Round and round the little gravelled garden the two sauntered in the scented dusk.

"I wonder whether I did not dream of something like this," said Mat, at last. "I think if I had found you all agog for the Jubilee with its fun and fume, I should have been almost disappointed. At least, it seems so to me now. Of course, I hope your sister will enjoy herself, and I am sure she will; but I am so

glad she went, and"—again the softer, more significant note—"so very glad you let her go."

Poor Nesta had never felt so much ashamed and yet so happy in her life. It was of no avail to stammer out a confused explanation which only served to show her to more advantage than ever in her companion's eyes. She had to accept his homage and his obvious conviction of her unselfish character, and inwardly resolve that, in the future, she would try to deserve it.

"And you are not going up at all?"

It was perfectly incredible to Captain Butterworth that a man who had paid twenty guineas for his seat should not go near it when, moreover, there was not even a chance of getting his money back; but it appeared that this was his strange nephew's intention. Mat had made up his mind in the night. The idea

of Ernestine wandering lonely among her sweet peas, of leaving her behind in however sweet a spot while he ruffled it among grandees in his costly place at the great Jubilee show, was not to be borne.

"If I could have taken her with me!" he thought; but that could not, of course, be done.

"Then, here goes!" cried Mat Butterworth, and tore up his ticket into small pieces.

Space forbids us to tell how that long summer day passed for him and for Ernestine. Wherever she went, there went he. Whatever duties and occupations she engaged in, he shared. She showed him her favourite walk; and they sat together in a shady nook by a bubbling stream at the very hour when, had things fallen out otherwise, each would have been differently ensconced, "And not together," as Mat significantly observed.

He pulled out his watch and told her exactly what would be passing as the moments flew by; he hoped Molly would be able to remember and tell him if his conjectures were correct. He did not seem at all to mind when a new telegram arrived—this time from Molly herself—to the effect that, as the party durst not venture forth to see the illuminations the same night, the crowd being too great, her aunt insisted on keeping her till Thursday. As for Nesta? Nesta was almost frightened to feel as she did. That telegram was like a reprieve.

So the next day it was the same thing over again; and by evening Nesta had learned all about her cousin's home-life in that far land, perceived that, in spite of his wealth and the luxury in which he lived, he was a solitary man with starved affections, and a large heart longing to be filled; and scarce daring to

believe it was so, yet had a conviction which thrilled every vein, namely, that he had already decided who could fill it.

"Seems to me you didn't lose so much through giving up your Jubilee seat after all," said the old captain, when they told him.



THOSE SORT OF PEOPLE

Those Sort of People



“I really cannot see why you should be so set upon going *there*,” said Mrs. Boscastle, with a contemptuous intonation on the last word, which directly indicated its status. “You have been determined about it from the very first. I never knew you so obstinate about anything.” She paused, but as there was no response, took up the theme with renewed animation. “It is not as if you were always so particular about engagements. I am sure I wish you were. When you are asked to other houses—when ‘Miss Boscastle’ is distinctly mentioned beneath your father’s and my name—as often as not you insist on Mary’s going.”

"Only in fair turn, mamma. 'Miss Boscastle' on an ordinary card means either of us. In this case it does not—as you know."

"Oh, I know; I know very well. Those sort of people must always have the best. They want to show you off, of course."

An impatient movement, but the speaker either did not or would not perceive it. "A tea party in West Kensington!" Again the disdainful inflection, this time, if possible, more accentuated than before. "In West Kensington! In Shepherd's Bush, I suppose, if the truth were told. In a little semi-detached villa facing the green, I dare say. It is too absurd to give up Ranelagh on a lovely June afternoon for such a wretched, such an absolutely squalid entertainment."

"You would have had me say this?"

"Edith, don't be ridiculous. And there is no need to get angry over

it. If you had done as I told you to do at the first, accepted *conditionally*—agreed to go if nothing prevented you——”

“If nothing better turned up.”

“Precisely. You would have meant that, and they would have understood it, and it would have been as much as they could have expected. You know I am quite glad—ahem! I entirely approve of your affection for your old governess ——,” Edith Boscastle raised her eyes, and her step-mother proceeded somewhat hurriedly, “It is all right and proper; Miss Peters was an excellent instructress, who deserved all the esteem you could give her; but, having ceased to have any connection with this house professionally, I must say I think it rather a pity—that is to say, we are always glad to see her here, without there being any occasion for your going among her people.”

"This is the first time she has ever asked it; and she inquired privately of you, if either papa or you would have any objection, before she mentioned the subject to me."

"She did, very properly. And if only it had not been for a Saturday, and we had not had Ranelagh tickets——"

"That need not matter, surely. You will take Mary; and Mary would greatly like to go."

Mrs. Boscastle fidgeted. What she longed to say, and did not dare to say, was, that while her plainer step-daughter would make no sensation, attract no admiring glances from the gay crowds in the haunt of fashion, she would have been perfectly good enough for the suburban studio, on which it was a shame to waste her sister. Debarred from giving vent to the sentiment, she could only feebly return to her first charge. "I could not have

believed you would be so tiresome, Edith."

Now Edith Boscastle was a wise girl; she did not attempt to argue the point. To have done so would have been to inflame opposition, and opposition occasionally led to a battle-royal in the doctor's house, subsequent to which peace would only be restored by giving up the point at issue. This she did not mean to do.

In her heart of hearts she not only felt the full force of her step-mother's argument, but it was backed up by a secret consciousness which had already caused more than one sigh to escape since the arrival of the coveted tickets. Some one had sent them—some one whom Edith liked very much indeed.

Under other circumstances she would have flown to her chamber to don her prettiest dress and hat, and joyful anticipation would have

painted a tint upon her cheek, and sparkle in her eye; but disappoint her poor, dear, humble little friend who had so long before arranged the day and hour, talked of it, planned for it, and whose preparations were doubtless now complete? She could not do this.

She had herself named a Saturday as being usually a free day; and the present Saturday had been absolutely barren of engagements three weeks before, at which time the quondam governess made her modest appeal. An artist brother (married, and entirely unobjectionable, as Mrs. Boscastle took care to note) was setting up his small studio on the outskirts of London, and having brought with him from abroad a collection of pictures and sketches, fancied it would be to him something of the coveted "start" so important in every career, if these could be viewed by friends likely

either to become themselves patrons, or to interest others more artistically disposed.

It was an acknowledged fact that no one could interest the head of the house in Harley Street as could the eldest daughter.

"We thought perhaps if *you* would come, Edith?" said Jane Peters, wistfully; and neither Edith nor any one else wondered why the speaker said *you*.

So that, on the whole, it was manifestly unfair in Mrs. Boscastle to profess a species of ignorance which could only be sheltered beneath insinuations totally wide of the mark, and yet unanswerable; because the girl who was both prettier and wittier than her sister could no more have alleged, "I am wanted because my father thinks more of one word from me than of a thousand from Mary," than she could have protested, "You, on your part, want me

because I reflect credit on you by my appearance, and Mary does not."

Nothing could be said openly, and she was obliged to trust to her step-mother's good taste and good feeling prevailing in the long run. Taste perhaps would hardly have effected much in Mrs. Boscastle's case, but she had, with all her defects—and they were patent to the dullest intelligence—heart enough to make her just stop short of giving pain to the simple girl who was so ready to acknowledge herself her sister's inferior, and so affectionately proud of the fact.

"Mary does not mind," Mrs. Boscastle would exclaim, with easy indifference. "Mary is a good girl, and of course she can't help seeing." On ordinary occasions she would herself be touched by Mary's ready acquiescence in any putting forward of the show member of the family. (We may be sure from whom this

idea emanated.) The lady would be touched and pleased, we say, and in high good humour would pat poor Mary's cheek for a "dear, unselfish creature," assuring her moreover that looks were nothing, and that many of the best marriages were made by the plainest girls. If the cheek flushed a little beneath such consolation, Mary's step-mother never saw it.

She was kind to both the girls in her way. Luckily for them, and perhaps for herself, she had no children of her own, and they were thus able to retain through subsequent years the place they had been accorded in her estimation, when in the first gush of her marriage prosperity she had swallowed with joy anything and anybody connected with the elderly widower whose proposals secured her future comfort and independence. Previously she had earned her own living, and a

hard and precarious livelihood it had been.

Accordingly, the two little ones who constituted Dr. Boscastle's sole family were hardly felt to be even in the way—she would have accepted him if there had been a dozen of them—and as the elder of the two bloomed and budded into lovely maidenhood, and as both were docile under her rule—had no spite against her—no desire to throw off her yoke—did not even seek to jostle her aside as she saw others with the genuine claim of motherhood jostled—she grew to entertain a warmer feeling towards them both than pupils who had known her in her capacity of governess could have believed possible.

In Edith her pride might be centred; but where vanity and social ambition did not bar the way, there was as much, if not positively more, affection for Mary.

Pride and social ambition—those two ever-green demons—did, however, not infrequently rumple up the waves when otherwise all might have been smooth sailing between the three with whom our little story is most concerned. Mrs. Boscastle could not look at Edith without noting the elegance of her shape, the pose of her head, and the delicate curves of her chin and brow. She was forever making comparisons between her and others of her age and sex. She watched them go out and in, took stock of their clothes, their movements, their manners and affectations. She did not like it if a young visitor were taller or smarter.

In her own mind the conviction was assured that Edith at her best, in lively spirits and becoming raiment, could out-distance any of her peers; but she knew that it behoved Edith to be at her best. It was therefore imperative that she

should go into public of her own accord, gladly and willingly—not to be dragged thither because Mrs. Boscastle would not go without her.

It was also necessary to let her alone when there; to permit her to talk to whom she chose, walk or sit, as she preferred. Edith's step-mother made quite a study of her charge during the first year after she "came out" and at the end of that year she fully expected never to have another of the kind.

"I shall have no such credit in poor Mary," she sighed, in doleful prediction,—but she was not as well content as she might have been to find that although "poor Mary" was ready to step on the stage, the stage was not cleared for her, as prophets united in foretelling it would be. The beautiful Edith was still on hand.

So that now, in the middle of Edith's second London season, little

scenes such as we have hearkened to above were not altogether infrequent in the doctor's house, and it only remains to say one thing more. Although Edith Boscastle had her own reason for finding the path of fidelity and kindness a hard one to tread on in the day in question, she would sooner have died than confided this to her step-mother. There was plenty of goodwill but no real sympathy between natures so opposite.

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“Do you think she will come?” said Mr. Harold Peters, in his thin, nervous voice. He had been hammering and hanging, and wearing himself out ever since morning in the little, hot double-room now turned into a picture-gallery. “Young ladies are so forgetful.”

“Edith will not forget. She is as true as steel,” asserted Edith's sponsor, confidently; “when she was

in the schoolroom, if she promised to do a thing she would do it, though a thousand lions stood in the path."

"Lions? Oh, well, we hardly run to 'lions' in West Kensington; I wish we did." The artist laughed a feeble, high-pitched, anxious little pretence of a laugh. "Even one lion would be a 'draw' worth any money to us at the present moment. But this ex-pupil of yours—you speak as if she were rather a determined, dare-devil sort of character, eh? Suppose she takes a wrong turn? Suppose she is in a carping, fault-finding humour? Suppose——"

"Nay, dear brother, with idle suppositions we need not cumber ourselves. Real facts are hard enough to deal with." The gentle creature heaved a patient sigh. "We have been successful so far," she continued, more briskly. "Everybody has been kind in promising to come

to-day; the weather is cool and fresh outside, though our little house is rather warm; as for the tea and strawberries"—looking complacently at a small set-out, which had been arranged with care, and sent forth a delicious odour, tempting to the most jaded palate. "Grace has surpassed herself," continued the speaker, smiling round at another slight, colourless figure which glided forward from back regions at the moment.

It was characteristic of all three that they spoke in muffled tones, and moved as afraid of free, unrestrained action. With many tremors they had approached this day in their lives which meant to them a crisis.

And one of the three, she who had boldly conceived the project and thrown her whole soul into it, had to keep to herself the trump card with which her sleeve was trembling!

She had it there; now and then it almost peeped out; had there been a Harold without his Grace, or a Grace without her Harold, it must have been produced in moments of dire secrecy,—but stickler as she was for absolute confidence between husband and wife, how could she expect aught than that a discovery upon which she had alit by sheerest accident, but which might now be turned to rare account, would not have been the subject of conversation and conjecture between the fond pair?

This was not to be borne. Her dear Edith's name was not to be bandied about by strangers, even with no ill intent; and no one guessed that the staunch espouser of the brother's cause and prophetess of his fame, had a little wire to pull on her own account, which no other fingers must presume to touch.

“Lady Victoria Swallowfield!”

Good gracious! Her ladyship to be the first to arrive, and no one to hear her announced!

This, it must be confessed, was the first thought which sent a thrill of disappointment through the breast of the artist's poor little wife.

Possibly it was a vulgar thought, but Grace was but a homely tradesman's daughter, and she had never spoken to a "Lady" Anybody in her life. And she had counted, poor soul, on the sensation in her little room when the door should open to admit such a guest, and on the faces of the others when Jane should go forward in her quiet, composed manner to receive her own especial friend.

Jane would show nothing. She might feel the honour, perhaps she might even murmur her sense of it into Lady Victoria's ear,—but outwardly, she would be as calm as if such an event were of everyday occurrence.

Harold and his wife had been assured when in doubts as to the propriety of sending an invitation to the stately dame of quality, that Jane would see them through,—and with that rod on which to lean, they had been able to bear the anticipation.

But here was the terrible moment, with all its pangs and none of its sweets! She felt the ill-luck to the bottom of her soul.

She did her best, however; and those who knew Lady Victoria would have told her that this august personage was unusually gracious. Ordinarily there was an atmosphere surrounding her ladyship in which it was not easy to breathe. She was shy, she was proud, she had a repellent manner, and a poker back. Even when most pleased to meet a neighbour or acquaintance, the slowly extended fingers and the frigid greeting made cordiality diffi-

cult on the part of the recipient. She would say, "I am so glad to see you," in tones that would more fittingly have expressed, "I wish you were at the other end of the earth."

But beneath the crust there were those who knew that a true heart beat, and that once admitted to Lady Victoria's esteem, the place was held in perpetuity. Jane Peters, when begging the favour of her kind friend's presence at the studio, had faithfully delineated its locality, and prepared her for its insignificance,—and Jane knew that she could not better have secured her object than by such a course. Benevolence now softened a countenance usually severe.

The one large chair in the room had been placed in its coolest part, and through the little window at the back a faint breeze fanned a meagre tree-top. "I am so thankful to get

into this pleasant shade," said Lady Victoria, cheerfully.

"How splendid she looks!" thought Grace Peters, from afar. "All that black silk and lace—so effective! And I am glad her ladyship is stout; somehow it makes so much *more* of her than if she were a thin woman. No one can help seeing her—even if she did come rather soon for her name to be heard."

Jane, too, took occasion to whisper that Lady Victoria was not going to hurry away. Lady Victoria would not have her tea just yet; she would like to sit and chat a while; and then go round the pictures and see the portfolio, and be ready for tea when others came in.

"So they will all see the carriage at the door," thought Grace.

She could not resist a peep outside, as she stood nervously by her teapots, there being nothing for her

to do the while Jane composedly conversed with the guest, and Harold hovered near, waiting the right moment for Art to be appealed to.

The big barouche, with its glittering harness and champing horses, gave an air to the whole neighbourhood. It seemed a shame that it should have to move aside presently, even for the very good little brougham with its glossy chestnut, which was the next arrival.

And more vehicles followed. People whom Grace had certainly expected to appear either on foot, or at best in cabs and hansoms, turned up in well-appointed equipages, with smart liveried servants on their box-seats—so that by the time the apartment within was full (and it held more than could have been supposed), there was quite a festive little crowd in front, and the success of Mr. Peters' studio tea was assured.

Last of all to arrive was Miss Edith Boscastle. In she came, blushing like a rose, and looking very like a rose altogether in her freshest and fairest dress, all eagerness to explain a delay which must not be allowed to appear of set purpose, especially since there could be no mistaking the pause which made her silver tones audible on every side.

"How horrible! It looks as if I meant to make a grand *entrée*!" cried she to herself.

And she had tried to be there an hour before, and it was pure accident which had hindered her, and caused the sensation of the hour!

The sensation penetrated to the innermost recesses of the back room where Lady Victoria Swallowfield still clung to her big chair, though she was now contentedly sipping tea and munching cake. She had

accomplished the purpose for which she had come; admired and praised and given a handsome order; furthermore, she had promised to speak to her brother, the duke, who was on the point of having his largest country seat newly decorated, and had spoken about frescoes on the walls—(Harold's breath went and came as he listened)—Lady Victoria thought, yes, she certainly thought the duke would give attention to her recommendation, however he might eventually decide. She could, of course, promise nothing,—but there was enough without the promise to make the poor artist's eyes kindle.

Business done, the old lady enjoyed her tea, and at the moment of Edith Boscastle's appearance on the scene was hearkening favourably to a suggestion of strawberries; but somehow—and she remembered this afterwards with satisfaction, for her

doctor might have looked grave—she never got the strawberries.

“Who is that?” she exclaimed, suddenly. “What name did you say, my dear?”

Jane Peters, who was never very far from her ladyship’s chair, bent over the speaker in a moment. Edith had been in the room for about ten minutes.

“A former pupil of yours? I did not know that. I never heard you mention the Boscastles.”

Jane was silent. It had not been her business to mention the Boscastles.

“She is certainly a very pretty girl,” murmured Lady Victoria, scanning through her eyeglass the light figure in its rosebud draperies.

“She is as good as she is pretty,” said Miss Peters, in a low, distinct, emphatic voice. She was pulling her wire now.

The old lady dropped her eyeglass with a jerk, and turned round as though surprised. "Good, did you say? Good, Jane? And you speak from knowledge, of course. Your position would enable you to judge. But I thought, I certainly both thought and heard that these Boscastles——" she moved uneasily in her chair.

"Edith ought not to be confounded with her step-mother, Lady Victoria. She ought not to make one when you talk of 'these Boscastles.' Not that it is for me to say a word against Mrs. Boscastle, who was always kind to me, but——"

"I understand; I understand. A forward, pushing woman. And wild to be taken up by society—to fly in at every open door. They tell me she is determined to marry off those girls, and hawks them about in the most barefaced manner. I am old-fashioned and strict in my

notions, I suppose; but I must confess that ever since my son took to visiting at the Boscastles' I have worried over his being so intimate with people of whom I disliked everything I ever heard."

The governess was wisely silent.

"But she certainly has a sweet face!" said Lady Victoria, slowly raising the eyeglass a second time.

After a moment she beckoned down Jane's ear again. "How comes it that she is here to-day? I know my son expected to meet her at Ranelagh. He sent them tickets; I was annoyed with him for doing so. And Jane—oh, I wish I could speak to you alone—it is so difficult, young men are so tiresome to manage, and he says he is not a young man now. Jane, I *wish* you would tell me what you think." (No wonder strawberries and cream vanished from her ladyship's thoughts.) "I had no idea *you* could help me," she

murmured at last, almost reproachfully.

"Dear Lady Victoria, my help would be to bring up Edith, and let you judge her for yourself."

"It could do no harm, could it? And Victor would be pleased. And she does look—she really has a *charming* face" (eyeglass again in requisition). "Yes, I think I should like to speak to her; but one word, Jane, before you go. Did she know I was coming? Did you talk it over with her? Was there any scheme?—Oh, dear, what am I saying? Forgive me, my dear, I did not mean to be rude and stupid; and of course you—I could trust you anywhere. All I want is to know whether she——"

"Was absolutely ignorant of my having even invited you, Lady Victoria. It is not my place to tattle of the friendship with which you honour me; and I do not see Edith often

enough to make the mention of your name spontaneous. This dear, *kind* girl gave up her own pleasure and toiled out all this way to-day, purely from the same motive that you did yourself."

Lady Victoria pressed the hand which lay on the arm of her chair. Her ear, albeit by no means a quick one, caught a falter of emotion in the words which appealed at once to her best impulses.

"I gave up nothing, Jane. I had no gay parties waiting for me; no gallant admirer — ahem! — Jane, could *you* have done it? He may take it amiss, you know. Men are so tiresome and foolish; and a man in love—oh, you are discretion itself—you will never repeat. I can tell *you* that Victor is in love, desperately in love, with this girl, and will not hear a word against her. And I have been so put out and worried; for the idea certainly is that—I

hardly like to suggest it of that innocent-looking creature—but they do tell me she is throwing herself, or being thrown, at my son's head."

" 'Being thrown,' Lady Victoria, possibly! 'Throwing herself?' Never. One has but to know Edith Boscastle—"

"Then let me know her," quoth Lady Victoria, cutting the matter short.

"And now to pull wire No. 2," nodded Jane Peters to herself, as she threaded her way through the talking, tea-drinking assemblage. (She noted how brisk the chatter was, and how well everything was going, as she did so.) "Now, poor Edith, for your start and shock!"

But there was neither start nor shock.

Edith had long before descried the black figure in the large armchair, and recognised it.

Of course she did; of course she

quailed before such an apparition! How strange, how extraordinary, to meet it here! To run across Victor Swallowfield's proud, impenetrable mother, who was supposed never to go anywhere—never, at least, to any ordinary house, and whom Mrs. Boscastle had in vain hoped to meet at any public or private entertainment—to find her in this dingy little dwelling, in this back-of-beyond neighbourhood!

And how peaceful the great lady looked, sitting well back in her comfortable chair, placidly bearing her prominent part in the festivity. —[N. B.—This was before she saw Edith. Edith, as we know, had been present for some small space of time ere the vision of her, decked in all the charms of youth and beauty, so moved Lady Victoria that she inquired of Jane Peters, "Who is she?"]—Subsequently no one could have said that either the old face or

figure looked "placid." The face worked strangely, the figure moved incessantly.

The truth was that Fate, whimsical Fate, had pierced between joints of armour already rattling. Lady Victoria had had a bad night, followed by an unhappy morning. Her only son, the darling of her heart, had defied her,—and if that defiance were to last and she could not find some means by which to break it down, she might as well give up the ghost at once. Whom had she on earth but Victor?

And now, Victor had told her plainly what he, shy and reticent as herself, had only permitted to be guessed before, that her worst fears respecting a family she disliked and disapproved were to be realised forthwith.

Victor was a proud man; he did not deign to say, "You misjudge Edith Boscastle; you are unfair

and prejudiced. You might trust me to choose my own wife." Instead of this, he rather chuckled inwardly, monster that he was, at the thought of the triumph which lay before him, supposing all went well. His poor mother would strike her colours on the instant. A single interview would do it. But he meanly withheld that interview.

The two had been really angry with each other that morning; and Lady Victoria, outwardly serene as she appeared, was sore at heart as she drove along the dusty, noisy Uxbridge Road; and so—and so—no wonder the fine old lady now shook and trembled, her soul big with a new purpose.

She rose and curtsied as Edith was led up to the arm-chair.

Then she took the small hand in hers. "My dear," she said, and the young girl was emboldened to raise her eyes by the soft accents, "I

know you very well by name, and perhaps you know me equally well. My son——” A pause. A scarlet blush on the remorselessly exposed countenance before the speaker.

(“It is all right,” cried Lady Victoria to herself.)

And she needed no eyeglass to tell her how becoming was the blush—she must needs break off short, and fly to the point at once. “He is looking for you at Ranelagh to-day, and you are here instead?” she murmured interrogatively.

“I could not help it, Lady Victoria; I could not disappoint them.”

“Was that—forgive my asking it—your *only* reason, Miss Boscastle?”

“Indeed it was,” earnestly, almost tearfully. “I—they—it was an old engagement, and I knew they cared,—it was not like an ordinary party,—it would have been unkind, [cruel, to throw them over.

Oh, *you* know, Lady Victoria. You would not have done it yourself."

Lady Victoria nodded, her eyes shining. Then she slowly rose from her chair, to hold out her hand anew. "Miss Boscastle, I have a proposal to make. My son invited you to Ranelagh to-day, and you did not go; will you come there with me now, because his mother does?"

.
"Oh, Lady Victoria is carrying off Edith," said little Miss Peters, easily.

PRINTED BY R. R. DONNELLEY
AND SONS COMPANY AT THE
LAKESIDE PRESS, CHICAGO, ILL.



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